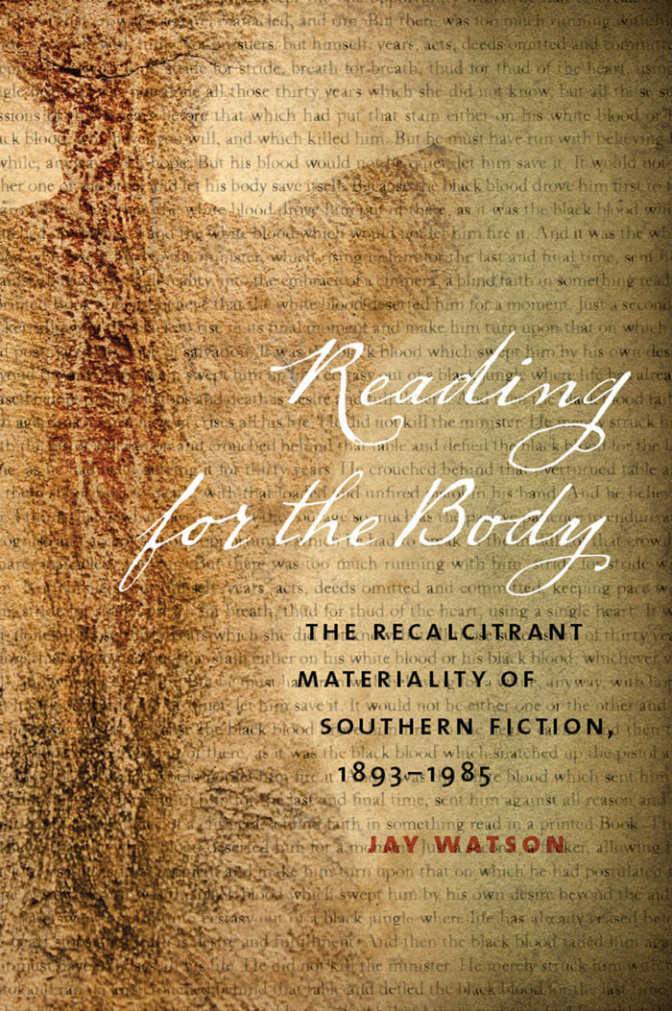


Reading for the Body

THE RECALCITRANT MATERIALITY OF SOUTHERN FICTION, 1893–1985

JAY WATSON

VISIT…



Reading for the Body



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The Recalcitrant Materiality of Southern Fiction, 1893–1985

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For Katherine and Judson

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Reading for the Body

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INTRODUCTION

Recalcitrant Materialities

A Southern Double Exposure

Early in 1923, Jean Toomer published a three-part poem, a triptych of sorts titled "Georgia Portraits," in the inaugural issue of a little magazine called *Modern Review*. This material resurfaced in the book Toomer would publish later that year, *Cane*, a foundational work of the Harlem and southern renaissances of the period. For the book, Toomer chose to break the original poem into its three constitutive parts and to place each, under a separate title, into section 1 of *Cane*, set in the African American world of rural central Georgia. The second of the originally linked verses appeared as the next-to-last selection in section 1's antiphonal rhythm of poetry and prose, and it came closest to retaining the original title. Toomer called it "Portrait in Georgia":

> Hair—braided chestnut,
> coiled like lyncher's rope,
> Eyes—fagots,
> Lips—old scars, or the first red blisters,
> Breath—the last sweet scent of cane,
> And her slim body, white as the ash
> of black flesh after flame. (Toomer 29)

Clearly, a reader need not look particularly far or deep to discern the presence of the human body in this poem. Its imagery consists of little more than bodily materials—specific parts and attributes. Its title announces that the poem participates in the representational conventions of the portrait genre, with its typical emphasis on the physical features of its human subject, especially those features located in the upper regions of the body: head, face, torso. For much of the history of this genre, subjects were drawn from social and cultural elites: portraits were largely reserved for those with the economic means to commission them and the leisure time to sit through the lengthy and labor-intensive process of artistic reproduction. The subject of Toomer's portrait appears, at least on first inspection, to be such an elite figure. After some initial indeterminacy, the poem closes with lines that re-

veal this figure to be female and white, and the allusion to "her slim body" hints at that element of "miniaturization" that, in Patricia Yaeger's influential critique (*Dirt and Desire* 128–140), denotes even as it discounts the privileged class position of the white *lady*. Moreover, as the poem's title reminds us, this is not just any white lady but a white lady "in Georgia"—a raced, gendered, classed, and regionally encoded body that in its early twentieth-century historical moment was subject to powerful and contradictory forces, extremes of entitlement, objectification, and constraint. It is also true that, by Toomer's day, the portrait had become a popular, democratically accessible medium, with the advent first of studio and then of snapshot photography (A. Wood 77, 88–89), so that, in 1923, featuring a more demotic, vernacular subject in a portrait in Georgia would not have been unusual.[1] And such a subject does emerge on closer inspection of the poem, behind—and, more suggestively, *in*—the features of the white female figure in the portrait's foreground. Toomer's lyric thus retains traces of its original title and context: this portrait in Georgia actually contains two "Georgia portraits" in a body-centered double exposure that itself doubles as a mode of southern exposure.

This becomes clearer when we contemplate the poem's equally vexed relationship to another intensely body-oriented representational form, the poetic genre of the blazon. Typically a short lyric celebrating, and sometimes also addressed to, the speaker's beloved, the blazon proceeds to catalog, one by one, the most desirable, memorable physical features of its subject and to linger, lovingly and sometimes leeringly, over the subject's distinctive charms. "Portrait in Georgia" offers just this sort of itemized inventory—hair, eyes, lips, white skin—and thereby threatens to reduce its fair subject to a ludicrous collection of dismembered physical fragments, in an inadvertently anatomizing effect that has rendered the blazon vulnerable throughout its history to parody and self-parody. Toomer, however, goes beyond parody. As the poem elaborates on the emblazoned attributes of its subject, it begins to turn monstrous, to morph into a grotesque hybrid linking the precious body of the southern white woman first to the basic equipment and then to the bodily damage of spectacle lynching, as lynch rope and burning coals yield to scarred, blistered flesh and finally to the human ashes that drift earthward from the bonfire's flame—to become, perhaps, like the "pyramidal sawdust pile" that smolders through several of *Cane*'s other vignettes of Georgia. With this transformation, the poem's double exposure emerges in full; the conventional portrait blurs into the more gruesome visual genre of the lynching photograph, which Shawn Michelle Smith has described as "the shadow image embedded in the white middle-class portrait" in the turn-of-the-century United States (*Photography* 118).[2]

As Smith (*Photography* 115–118; "Evidence" 14–17); Dora Apel (44–46, 54–56); Jacqueline Goldsby (214–281); Grace Elizabeth Hale (229–230);

Katherine Henninger (36–39); Amy Louise Wood (74–76); and others have shown, lynching photography helps reveal the thoroughly modern, rather than the "barbaric" or atavistic, nature of spectacle lynching, with its direct ties to sophisticated capitalist networks of transportation, communication, representation, and consumption. The photographs, which were often made by local or itinerant professional portrait photographers who made a point to be on the scene, were printed and sold as quickly and widely as they could be distributed. On occasion they were mass-produced and circulated as postcards (Goldsby 263–278; A. Wood 107), part of a diverse and horrifying class of "souvenirs"—whether commodities or other mementos, including body parts from the victims—that turned African American suffering and death into a source of consumer pleasure for whites both in and beyond the U.S. South. Moreover, as a quick, painful tour through James Allen et al.'s *Without Sanctuary* collection reveals, the slim bodies of white women are often present in lynching photographs, which frequently depict the victims flanked or surrounded by lynchers and onlookers, sometimes throngs of them (see, for instance, Allen et al. figs. 10, 22, 23, 25, 31, 38, 57, 97; Anthony Lee fig. 1).[3] This in turn raises the possibility that Toomer's "portrait" in Georgia simply *is* a lynching photograph, in which a slim white figure stands off to one side, or perhaps in the foreground, as a witness to (and participant in) a spectacle that, in ways she may not be fully aware of, defines, constructs, and disciplines her.

At first, "Portrait in Georgia" endeavors to manage the gruesome homology between bodies and their respective visual genres—to create a kind of buffer, impose a reassuring distance, between the poem's incongruous elements—by orthographic means, with full dashes separating the tersely, dispassionately rendered insignia of southern feminine beauty from the violent phraseology that so disturbingly annotates them. The effect is similar to, perhaps a forerunner of, the "lenticular" logic that Tara McPherson sees at work in later, post–Civil Rights–era "economies of visibility" (25), juxtaposing without relating images of white and black in pursuit of a separatist agenda of visual and racial "partition[ing]" (28). Now you see her, now you see him—but in a flicking, back-and-forth movement across the dashes that attempts to keep the figures spatially and conceptually discrete, to forestall recognition of the deeper cultural logic that links them. As the poem unfolds, however, two things happen to stymie this exercise in optical discipline. First, there is a subtle shift in the imagery associated with the woman's physical features. As noted, that imagery is initially drawn from the deadly machinery of lynching itself, from the implements that inflict bodily harm: hair braided like rope, eyes aglow like burning fagots. In this way, the act of celebrating white feminine beauty is yoked with, shadowed, and haunted by racialized extralegal violence, as if that very beauty—indeed, as if the woman's very

body—were an accomplice in the crime, harboring an intrinsic antagonism toward the lynching victim.

Beginning with line 4, however, the woman's physical attributes are balanced directly against the victim's own: lips to wounds, living breath to dying gasp, intact torso to incinerated one. Here the blazon's anatomizing conventions meet their nightmare image—a perverse anti-blazon—as the poem's second body materializes to haunt and shadow the exemplary body that occasioned the poem. This new alignment of body with body, rather than that of body with the weapons of racial violence, suggests a reconfiguration of the dynamic linking the poem's principal figures, from one of violent hierarchy to something more like identification, a commonality in victimization. Perhaps the anatomization going on to the left of Toomer's dashes bears underlying affinities with the more literal and horrific anatomization to the right of them—as if such linked fragmentations were simply systemic, a fact of life "in Georgia." Perhaps this is why, in line 6, the dashes drop away altogether in a syntactic rush toward the poem's only enjambed line ending, collapsing "Portrait's" orthographically segregated bodies toward and into each other in a final hybridity that reveals the woman's treasured whiteness as the material aftermath of lynching, and the damage to the black body as white womanhood's material precondition. By the poem's end, then, a body emblazoned has become hopelessly entangled with, implicated in, and produced from a body all too literally ablaze.

"Portrait in Georgia" brilliantly exploits the irony that it was precisely such entangling intimacies between white women and black men that turn-of-the-century lynching ideology sought to prevent. According to this ideology, lynching was a necessary evil that arose in the post-Reconstruction South to prevent or contain the perceived threat of sexual aggression by black men against white women (see Brundage 58–72; Cash 113–118; Hale 199–209, 227–239; J. Hall 145–157; T. Harris 83–94; W. White 251–267; Wiegman 81–113; Joel Williamson, *Rage* 120–126). As commentators like Ida B. Wells and Walter White already recognized at the time, and as subsequent generations of historians have elaborated, this fantasy of a social emergency—the so-called rape narrative or complex—was an anxious response on the part of the white male imagination to the prospect of significant social change in the South: to African Americans seeking economic opportunity, political enfranchisement, and social recognition in the wake of emancipation; to women seeking to widen their sphere of influence beyond the domestic realm (Wells 13; W. White 82–113). With insidious efficiency, the rape narrative pitted these minoritized figures against each other to check the social advancement of both groups. Because the threat of the "black beast rapist" was thought by whites to pervade southern public space, white women were urged to eschew a more public identity and confine themselves to the traditional domains of

home and family. And to safeguard white female chastity, black men had to be rendered docile, nonthreatening, and unassertive by a comprehensive battery of disciplinary and repressive measures, culminating in the all-out collective violence of lynching. By designating white men as the social agents authorized to uphold and enforce these vital prohibitions, lynching ideology helped consolidate white male power. It fell to white men above all to impose and maintain the social, spatial, and sexual distance that would keep members of these other groups from coming together to ignite change in the region—the distance that finds its textual equivalent in Toomer's dashes.

But as "Portrait" performatively demonstrates, the same iron bar that holds apart the poem's central figures also brings them into an unsettling imaginative and affective linkage that provokes reactions ranging from desire to dread. The poem vividly reflects how the effort to assign black men and white women to different regions of social, sexual, and textual space and to separate columns in the South's ethical ledger only fixes and fuses the two all the more indelibly in the dominant cultural imaginary. The poem's mutually implicated bodies hint at mutually constitutive subject positions: his violated, tortured body establishes her whiteness and charges it with value, even as the vulnerability of her slim white frame functions as a tacit demand that his flesh be *blackened*, meaning not just racialized but hideously carbonized as well, heat blistered and fire scarred. It is in just this sense that photographic portraits of "revered southern white female bodies" could serve as the representational and ideological "flip side" of lynching postcards, as Katherine Henninger observes (41). "Portrait's" double vision—a trompe l'oeil effect hinging on the flickering interplay of (human) figure and (dehumanized) ground—details how the South's minoritized bodies are compelled to do the white man's cultural work for him, how they become caught up in what another white lady from Georgia would call "the twisting, turning dance" of Jim Crow social relations, an intricate choreography not of their own making (L. Smith 95).

The considerable achievement of "Portrait in Georgia" is nowhere more evident than in the sheer amount of cultural information and depth of insight the poem manages to generate from its extremely condensed presentation of a pair of Georgia bodies seemingly confined to and immobilized within the static dimensions of portraiture. Toomer's lyric is a striking confirmation of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's theoretical account of the human body as a crucial "symbolic domain" of Western thought and representation. On this account, the body, along with "psychic forms, geographical space, and the social formation," functions as a primary source of concepts, sites, and images for basic cultural sense-making, especially concerning the vertical hierarchies of value and authority that inform human experience and social relations (2). "Cultures 'think themselves' in the most immedi-

ate and affective ways through the combined symbolisms of these four hierarchies" and the high-low oppositions that structure them (3). What is more, one characteristic way in which these symbolic vocabularies operate in social discourse is by means of switchings or transcodings that draw on the conceptual elements of one domain in order to map the conceptual or experiential territory of another. According to Stallybrass and White, the body occupies a privileged place in this process as an "intensifying grid" through and upon which "transcodings between different levels and sectors of social and psychic reality are effected" (26). The felt immediacy and availability of the body, what Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain* calls its aura of incontestable reality, make it an especially powerful and flexible instrument to think with.

"Portrait in Georgia's" rhetoric of the body performs precisely the transcoding operations outlined by Stallybrass and White. The poem's bodies, for instance, offer it a way to interrogate a pair of intertwined identities lived out in a highly charged cultural atmosphere of suspicion, insinuation, threat, fear, intimacy, and attraction. In this context, the mere availability of the two bodies for portraiture already underscores the vulnerability of the corresponding subject positions to inspection and surveillance. Moreover, the poem arranges these bodies in a relation of hierarchy or primacy that broadly evokes the dynamic between the conscious and unconscious elements of psychological experience. Line after line, the woman's features are noted first; she is the poem's conscious focus, its manifest content. Yet each new elaboration of those features pulls up an answering detail from her African American counterpart's desperate, hyper-embodied predicament, as if Toomer's portrait of a lady is staging the return of its own repressed, the materialization of the very figure whom southern white womanhood must not—yet cannot help but—evoke, the figure *upon* whom it is founded. The poem's manifest content, in other words, functions as a screen image: the nightmare of a black body on brutal, spectacular display is displaced (upward?) by the pleasing prospect of a white body exhibited in a very different manner and context, allowing the violent affect of lynching—the aggression and rage—to be sublimated into the lightly eroticized aesthetic contemplation of what Mikhail Bakhtin would call a classical body: smooth, slim, self-contained, and superficially unmarked (320–322). More difficult to pinpoint in this process is the identity of Toomer's speaker, in large part because within the scheme of the poem that subject position is not assigned to a body, only to a point of view: the disembodied eye that composes the portrait. The unsituated character of that gaze, though, strongly hints at an elite white male viewer, since one of the privileges that has historically accrued to such men in the South and other modern societies is the impersonal, unbiased quality they can so unconflictedly attribute to their universalizing pronouncements and claims—the ability to speak from anywhere and nowhere, from a stance free of the

confines and dictates of the body. (Moreover, doesn't the whole enterprise of using dashes to throw up a *cordon sanitaire* between the poem's minoritized bodies smack of white male anxiety? For whom are these bodies so dangerous?) In these ways, then, Toomer draws on bodily details, relations between bodies, and the interplay of their presence and absence to explore what Stallybrass and White call the "psychic forms"—identities, subject positions, and distinct aspects of mental life—that shape interior experience in Georgia.

What is more, the same bodies that introduce us to the psychic spectrum of Jim Crow also enable Toomer to map the poem's social sphere. "Portrait" boils the social down to its most elementary configuration, the relation between two human beings. But these particular figures have not been chosen haphazardly. On the contrary, their positioning and coordination in the poem don't just follow the logic of segregation but model that logic in a most profound way. The economy of this model does not detract from its precision. In a very real sense, the lines of force running between the poem's two bodies *are* the Jim Crow social order writ small, including not only what this order was purported to be by segregation's advocates—rigidly striated, racially polarized, canny, and ruly—but what it actually was: fluid and hybrid, prone to unpredictable mixtures and dangerous mergings, a world in which fascination and repulsion, identification and disavowal, lust and loathing didn't contradict so much as complement and compel each other. The discursive transcoding that allows the poem to conjure a complex social microcosm out of a pair of interimplicated Georgia bodies bears out the wisdom of Farah Jasmine Griffin's observation that Toomer's portrait *in* Georgia is also a portrait *of* Georgia (24): the social formation is not just the poem's principal setting but one of its principal subjects.

Finally, Toomer's body portrait of "Georgia" encompasses the spatial topography as well as the social order implied by that proper noun. Most immediately, "Portrait's" imagery follows a vertical hierarchy in which the woman's defining features are drawn from the upper regions of the body, typically associated in the Western imaginary with mind, spirit, and soul, while the description of the lynching victim, in the absence of specific references to the head or face, evokes instead that other, lower "stratum" of the body that, according to Bakhtin, points up the mortality, carnality, mutability, and animality of the human form (368–370, 394–395, 409–411). That mutability is underscored in the poem's closing lines, as we witness the physical transformation of black flesh into ash. Anne Goodwyn Jones has described the way southern gender ideology conscripts white women as regional symbols, living emblems of the South's peculiar purity, virtue, and élan (*Tomorrow* 1–50; see also A. Scott 4–21, 46–79). But while "Portrait" conveys the rigidity of that cultural role in the clenched monosyllables with which it enumerates white female attributes, the burden of personifying a place falls even more

heavily on the poem's African American figure, whose black body doesn't symbolize southern space or even really occupy it any longer but has instead *become* that space, in the process Yaeger labels "reverse autochthony" (*Dirt and Desire* 15–18). Here "Portrait" assumes the function of a topographical map, introducing us to "Georgia" as a physical landscape whose very soil is mulched and larded with African American organic material. We know from the region's agricultural history that generations of southern farmers from precolonial times forward chose to burn over their fields and brushlands periodically to restore the fertility of the soil. "Portrait in Georgia" exposes a hideous anti-pastoral version of that practice and links it not only to the cultivation of the earth but more intricately to the construction and cultivation of southern white ladyhood itself. The black man's reduction to ash, the poem implies, supplies the material foundation, the rustic platform or plinth, upon which she is empedestaled, monumentalized, and "portrayed." In this context, Waldo Frank's observation, in his foreword to the first edition of *Cane*, that Toomer's "Georgia Negro is not a downtrodden soul to be uplifted; he is material for gorgeous painting" (139) takes on far more ominous overtones than Frank must have intended.

The absence of the African American person from a physical environment that nonetheless bears the residual material traces of the black body points to a second spatial scheme at work in "Portrait's" grammar of bodies, a geography more expansive than that of "Georgia" alone. Griffin's study of African American migration narratives cites James Weldon Johnson's 1912 novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man,* as the first narrative to posit lynching specifically as the precipitating factor behind black outmigration from the South (25), but she credits the more widely read *Cane* with popularizing this motif, which informed the work of Richard Wright and numerous other authors. Indeed, *Cane*'s structure strongly implicates lynching in the text's own movement from one regional topography to another: "Portrait in Georgia," with its indirect account of southern racial violence, is followed by "Blood Burning Moon," a short story that culminates with an explicit scene of lynching, then by a formal section break signaling the transition to part 2, whose lyrics, stories, and sketches are set in urban centers of the Northeast and Midwest such as Washington, D.C., and Chicago. Thus, the text's own topography cites and engages a broader North-South geography pointing beyond Georgia toward new spaces, stories, and possibilities.

I suggest, though, that this geography of migration is already fully in place in "Portrait in Georgia" in encapsulated form. Once again the disposition of bodies proves crucial to the poem's spatial symbolism. In light of the oppressive presence from start to finish of the white female body, which provides the justification for lynching and signals its constant threat, the ephemerality of

the black body in "Portrait"—the fact that it appears late in the text only to vanish entirely by the end—raises an interesting interpretive possibility. Thus far I have treated lynching as the poem's foregone conclusion, as if the absence of a clearly delineated African American body from the closing lines constitutes irrefutable evidence of that body's eradication by rope and fagot. Yet that missing black figure might also denote a lynching averted, and a landscape devoid of a living black presence could be read as the aftermath of a wide-scale African American exodus from the southern social, economic, and (extra)legal scene, an exodus prompted in part by lynching fears or, as the old blues lyric has it, "One of these days, and it won't be long, you'll look for me but baby, I'll be gone." If the poem's imagery suggests a successful evasion of racial terror via outmigration rather than the imposition of racial violence in the white woman's name, its whole emphasis shifts from African American victimization to African American agency and survival, and its ability to conjure—out of the spatial dynamic between an intrusively present and a conspicuously absent body—the historical logic linking lynching and migration invites a reappraisal of Toomer's lyric as a migration narrative in its own right.

The Nation's Bodies

As I hope my account of "Portrait" illustrates, Stallybrass and White's theoretical attention to the body, beyond its general heuristic value, is especially germane to the study of representations of the U.S. South, a region that has functioned in the national imagination for over two centuries as the basis for idiosyncratic modes of American identity (psychic forms), as a problematic topography within the geographic space of the nation, and as a specific social formation bearing an uneasy inside-outside relation to U.S. society more broadly considered. Thus, the symbolic domain of the body offers a powerful instrument for interrogating these and other domains of southern culture. In general, writers and artists engaged with the region have been quicker to take up this instrument, and more sensitive to its nuances, than have scholarly commentators on southern society and culture. Indeed, literary and artistic representations of the South are abundantly peopled with remarkable bodies: physically excessive or deficient bodies; sexually contradictory or racially ambiguous bodies; wounded, traumatized, or incomplete bodies; moving, morphing, volatile bodies; diseased, disabled, or disfigured bodies; disappeared or spectral bodies; commodified bodies; bodies out of place; disciplined and punished bodies; laboring bodies; aestheticized, ethereal, or otherwise exemplary bodies—the list could go on and on. Such bodies may offer a mode of cultural critique or serve as vital elements of a southern or national cultural pedagogy. Critics of the region's art and literature

have occasionally registered the bodily density and strangeness of southern cultural production, often under the rubric of the gothic or the grotesque, but with a few important exceptions—most notably, the work of Patricia Yaeger—a more careful, thoroughgoing consideration of the body's complex and prominent role(s) in southern writing has been slow to emerge in southern studies.[4] More attention to the subject is needed, and this book is intended to provide a step in that direction.

Clearly, neither southern writers nor their characters enjoy any particular monopoly over the body as a methodological instrument or a thematic focus. Though we live our bodies in different ways, embodiment is our common lot as human subjects. So what attunes southern writing so powerfully and vividly to the body? What makes this literature so complexly hyper-embodied, so richly, thickly, problematically carnal? One answer might be that writers of the U.S. South have simply followed the lead of a long tradition in U.S. intellectual and cultural history of thinking about the South and its inhabitants through, and sometimes *as*, the body. Scholarship in the field of American studies by Lauren Berlant, Russ Castronovo, Dana Nelson, Donald Pease, and others has focused on how, from the early national period forward through a long arc of modernization, U.S. models of national identity and citizenship came to emphasize forms of abstract personhood and disembodied or "anesthetized" subjectivity in order to capitalize on the ideological power of the nation's emergent political ideologies of liberty and democracy.[5] Castronovo has written compellingly of the "dematerialization and spiritualization of democratic practices" at work behind what he calls necro citizenship in the nineteenth-century United States (xii), "a state technology" that exchanges "complexly lived" and embodied subjects for "people dressed up in the unremarkable off-the-rack garb of generic personhood" (6).[6] Berlant has likewise called attention to the "disembodied entitlements of liberal citizenship" ("The Queen" 458) whose "universalizing logic" has informed U.S. "norms of privilege" at virtually all points in the nation's history (470). Yet the development of a normative U.S. national identity around what philosopher David Lloyd has called the modern "subject without properties"—not incidentally, the same Enlightenment paradigm that underpins normative whiteness as a modern racial formation in the West (see Dyer 38)—was hardly an unvexed endeavor. From the beginning, the ideological fiction of a legally transparent, spiritually ethereal, politically "generic" national subject was troubled by ironies of a decidedly historical and material nature. Pease has noted how "the national narrative produced national identities by way of a social symbolic order that systematically separated an abstract, disembodied subject from resistant materialities such as race, class, and gender" (3), and how, by the same token, such residual materialities proved indispensable to the dominant discourse of national personhood—both as exceptions to

the national rule of abstract citizenship and as the necessary forms of alterity that delineated a field of national belonging (4).[7] Castronovo's necro citizenship is thus haunted by the materialities—and, in particular, by the bodies—that expose the lifeless condition of U.S. political subjectivity even as they are enlisted discursively in its definition and construction. Castronovo and his fellow New Americanists are especially attentive to the myriad ways in which national bodies and their material and historical traces talk back to the universalizing gestures that constitute U.S. subjects and citizens, supplying the rudiments of a counterdiscourse to the dominant rhetoric of U.S. national identity and its false premise of an "abstract America . . . where bodies do not live historically, complexly, or incoherently, guided by a putatively rational, civilized standard" (Berlant, *The Queen* 80).[8]

Throughout this history, the South—first as a group of British colonies, then as a group of U.S. states—has served the national imagination as a fertile field for the disturbing materialities Pease describes. Centuries of literary and visual representations have linked the region with these residues—whether as harboring them or as embodying them directly. As Jennifer Rae Greeson demonstrates in a 1999 essay that has proven to be groundbreaking for new southern studies scholarship, the strategy of invoking the material body in the discursive construction of the southern territories and their inhabitants as distinctively and problematically situated with respect to U.S. narratives of national identity was already firmly in place by the 1790s. In the era of its emergence as the first postcolonial nation, the new republic set out to dissociate itself both from its "past colonial status" (213) as a British possession and from the "residual coloniality" that still haunted its economic and cultural infrastructure, potentially unsettling its claims to exceptionalism as a new kind of nation-state. As Greeson explains, early national print culture pursued this strategy of cultural nationalism not only by "*replacing* the colonial tropes previously used to figure the New World colonies in general" but also by "*displacing* those tropes onto the south of the newly forming U.S.," the five states lying to the south of Delaware. This displacement process accomplished two important ideological objectives for the new nation, according to Greeson. Not only did it allow the United States to disavow colonialism, "to purge remaining colonial realities from the new national idea" (238) and thus promote U.S. exceptionalism, but it also helped the United States to "approximate European empire by providing the nation imaginatively with possession of tropical plantation colonies" (238) of its own, thus establishing its metropolitan credentials. At the moment of nation formation, then, we can already see the southernmost U.S. states functioning as what Leigh Anne Duck calls the nation's region, a site designated by U.S. cultural production and fantasy projection as a zone of temporal anteriority and developmental alterity (see Duck 1–17).

As Greeson makes clear, the construction of this nation-South, self-other, postcolonial-colonial binary depended heavily on European representational conventions that figured coloniality via the materiality, first, of land ("vast undifferentiated tracts" of undeveloped territory, ripe for the metropolitan picking; 228) and later, increasingly, of the tropicalized bodies of the region's natives and residents. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur's project of rehabilitating the colonial planter as the American farmer, for example, strategically stumbles in his book's southernmost locale, Charles-Town, South Carolina, where he encounters vestiges of colonial corruption that prove exceptional to his version of U.S. exceptionalism. The contrast between the figure of the American farmer and the figure of the southern/colonial planter is mediated via the figure—the body—of a caged African slave whose body is slowly picked apart by birds (Greeson 217–218). The violence directed against this body points to the moral degradation of the planters; the abject body itself hints at the biological inferiority of the colonized. Both were key representational elements of tropicalizing discourse. Indeed, several features of Crevecoeur's Charles-Town scene—the nakedness, passivity, and dependency of the slave body, its exposure and public display, and the backdrop of a dense, invasive natural landscape—directly reproduce European representational strategies that were once used to depict "America" in its entirety as a British colonial possession (see Greeson 221). In *Letters from an American Farmer*, however, they work to fashion a subaltern South.

Nor was this tropicalizing discourse reserved for southern black bodies alone. By the 1790s, magazine sketches and early national novels published in the urban centers of the northeastern United States were presenting white southerners as hyper-embodied figures whose specific physical features and attributes—drunkenness, lechery, indolence, gluttony, violence, thick impenetrable accents, and creolized dialects—conjured up the specter of coloniality and its "negative moral associations" (Greeson 231; see 231–232, 235–236 more generally).[9] In the representations of early national print culture, then, southern bodies bear the visual and auditory signs of colonial depravity and excess—a difference *within* as well as *from* the emerging nation. And it is in this specific sense of evoking internal difference, a colonial remnant "within the real political borders of the nation" (230), that the "materialities" employed to construct a pejorative southern distinctiveness prove ideologically resistant (as Pease would predict) as well as ideologically useful. After all, as Greeson observes, "figuring the south as colonial threaten[ed] to expose the exploitive basis of the entire nation" (219).

Turning to the nineteenth century, Castronovo charts a similar dialectic between fictions of U.S. identity and public citizenship modeled on the ontologically thin, politically neutral "virtual body" of the legal person (36)—fictions that drain subjects of their materiality, history, and memory—and the

lived and living eccentricities and densities of national bodies whose "sensuous residuum . . . troubles the vagueness" of abstract legal and political categories (8). Castronovo can sound a lot like Pease in describing the "recalcitrant materialities that confound the story of citizenship" in the United States (10). If necro citizenship serves as his umbrella term for "the rhetorical and representational processes by which bodies become citizens" (10), Castronovo's methodological strategy is to enlist excessive or otherwise remarkable bodies as the conceptual linchpins of a counterprocess in which inert, interchangeable citizens become—or, more precisely, are exposed as always already *being*—lively, "resediment[ed]" political and social subjects (58). What is remarkable is how often the recalcitrant materialities at the forefront of Castronovo's analysis are directly embodied by southern subjects or introduced into national awareness and practice through southern portals. *Directly embodied*: for Castronovo, the bodies of southern slaves and ex-slaves, in their contingent lives, social deaths, actual deaths, and messy physical specificities, simultaneously form the conditions of possibility for the nation's culturally unspecific discourse of "liberty" *and* give the lie to it by materializing the "accidents of the flesh" (34), the "institutional and corporeal encumbrances" (44), the "semantic wealth" (53), and the experiential excesses that are bracketed from period definitions of freedom as absolute, unconditional, and vested in the abstract bodies of state citizens (31, 8). The slave body, in other words, remembers what U.S. "freedom" forgets (59). *Southern portals*: in a perceptive discussion of mid-century spiritualism as a social and political phenomenon that offered white women a limited form of access to the presumptively male paradigm of abstract national personhood even as it helped extend the nation's disembodied civic discourse into ever-wider social territory, Castronovo notes that the mediumistic practices and forms of spirit possession that defined the movement were responses to, perhaps even offshoots of, Afro-diasporic rituals imported from "the Caribbean and southern regions of the United States" (160). Perhaps they snaked northward along the Underground Railroad to sites like Rochester, New York, where spirit rapping made its debut in the home of the Fox sisters at roughly the same time that Frederick Douglass launched an abolitionist newspaper there. In this context, Castronovo's claim that the "spiritualization of politics in the United States originates in displaced African bodies" (159) isn't as far-fetched as it may sound. To Castronovo's claim I would only add that the itineraries traced by these displaced bodies typically encompassed southern routes and roots.

American writers drew upon another collection of recalcitrant southern bodies during this period to engage imaginatively with pressing issues of national belonging and civic participation. As Andrew Jackson's Democratic administration removed property restrictions from the vote and ushered in

universal suffrage among white men, anxieties arose among the nation's economic and intellectual elites about the large new class of un- or underpropertied white voters that would henceforth have an active voice in the nation's political affairs. Would this infusion of new voters, many of them uneducated as well as poor or working class, bring new ideas, fresh perspectives, and greater fairness to U.S. democracy? Or would it dumb down the nation's political culture? The print culture in the United States responded to this debate with the development of a new literary genre that moved precisely this class of newly enfranchised Jacksonian political subjects into the foreground of literary representation. Commonly referred to as frontier, backwoods, or southwestern humor, this genre, through its characteristic narrative frame structures, placed working-class whites, overwhelmingly male, from the nation's rural hinterlands in active and often vociferous dialogue with representatives of the older political elites with whom they now shared power at America's polling places. While examples of this new literature surfaced from Maine to Texas, the lion's share of it focused on figures from the southern interior: Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's middle Georgians, Johnson Jones Hooper's Simon Suggs of Alabama, Henry Clay Lewis's Louisiana swamp rats, George Washington Harris's Sut Lovingood of east Tennessee, Joseph Glover Baldwin's Alabama and Mississippi schemers and speculators, and Thomas Bangs Thorpe's Arkansas bear hunter are some of the best-known examples.[10]

Borrowing some of the representational techniques developed in the 1790s to depict entitled southern whites, the southwestern humorists characteristically present their poor white subjects as intensely, overwhelmingly embodied (see Rickels). They drink to excess, disfigure each other in brawls, lust openly after inappropriate people, eat clay, stage elaborate pranks that physically abase their victims, and in general exhibit a bodily excess and indiscipline that flouts bourgeois norms of bodily etiquette. Even their whiteness grows weird, perplexing, and intrusive: Longstreet's Ransy Sniffle sports "a complexion that a corpse would have disdained to own" (Longstreet 37–38); Simon Suggs is baited by "a diminutive, yellow-faced" rustic obviously suffering from jaundice or some other dietary deficiency (Hooper 287); Hardin E. Taliaferro's southern villagers display similarly "sallow" features ("Larkin Snow" 134; "Ham Rachel" 137); and eighteen-year-old Sut Lovingood's full head of white hair hints at albinism (G. Harris 201). Above all, their voices are hypermaterialized: loud, overbearing, frequently out of place, and rendered grotesque on the page by dialect conventions whose orthographic excesses and liberties with spelling point both to illiteracy and, paradoxically, to new and startling possibilities for language and figuration. In their insistent emphasis on the voices of their subjects, and in particular on the material density and strangeness of those voices, the humorists zeroed

in on the defining political problematic of their Jacksonian times: how the voice of the unpropertied white male as political subject would manifest in and beyond the electoral process. Southwestern humor demonstrates how, as Castronovo might predict, the resistant materiality of southern voices opens up new models—alternately vitalizing and unnerving—for U.S. political life that challenge and exceed the disembodied paradigms and voices of abstract national citizenship. I will return briefly to this literature in chapter 2, but for now I would emphasize that the unruly southern bodies of antebellum humor are very much the nation's bodies, set down in the nation's region to assist in the nation's imaginative and cultural work.

On the other side of the Civil War, questions of postbellum citizenship posed significant challenges for U.S. politicians and intellectuals, and a new figure, once again southern and once again provocatively embodied, surfaced in the U.S. literary imagination to help the nation think them through. As Barbara Ladd explains, the place of white southerners in the reconstituted United States and within its postbellum schemes of citizenship and nationalism remained unclear to many contemporary observers, including southerners themselves. "The cultural debate about the capacities of the former slaveholder" revolved around a core set of issues: "the impact of slavery on the moral fiber of the former slaveholder, the former slaveholder's fitness for self-government, and the impact of the former slaveholder's assimilation upon the body politic" (*Nationalism* 30). After all, no matter how eager to be reassimilated to national values and reintegrated into the national polity and culture postbellum southern whites may have professed to be, they still retained troubling historical and ideological links to the now constitutionally un-American institution of slavery, to the colonial site of the plantation, and to the rival nation-formation of the now-defeated Confederate States of America. For these reasons, the postbellum southerner remained, in Ladd's words, "a dangerous border figure . . . who might look like an American and claim to be so (with greater fervor than other Americans at times) but who carries within him- or herself traces of the displaced and who might at some point act traitorously to undermine the progressive nation" (36). This ambiguous border condition found a somatic correlative, Ladd argues, in the body of the southern mixed-race figure, which begins to appear frequently in the literature of the late nineteenth century. The biological hybridity of this figure, along with its potential for assimilation into a surrounding dominant cultural order, gave white southern writers especially a way to explore the ramifications of their own ideological, historical, and national hybridity, to gauge their "own capacity for U.S. citizenship" (7). The residual blackness that serves as an alienating remainder and stumbling block in the octoroon's or creole's quest for U.S. assimilation finds its equivalent in the subterranean colonial and national histories that white southerners carried forward into

their postbellum lives, histories that point to nothing less than "the repressed histories" of U.S. nationalism itself (9). Ladd seems to follow Pease and anticipate Castronovo in stressing the resistant materiality of the octoroon's eccentric, excessive body: "mixed blood becomes the means through which post–Civil War white southerners dramatize their own recalcitrance" (35), their unwillingness or inability "to accomplish the transcendence of history that was required before [they] could be effectively redeemed" for the postbellum national mission (31–32).[11]

At the dawn of the twentieth century, visions of southern bodily alterity continued to haunt the nation and its progressivist social and political discourses. The lynching atrocities reported by Ida B. Wells in 1892 as specifically "Southern Horrors" linked regional distinctiveness to racial trauma, extralegal violence, and spectacular body damage (see especially 20–21). Diseases such as hookworm and pellagra and the physical symptoms associated with them supplied additional somatic badges of southern distinctiveness during this period, material threats to the integrity of the U.S. body politic that brought renewed attention to the region's perceived backwardness from representatives of the social services and health care sectors of the Progressive-era state (see Etheridge; Marcus). Indeed, as Matt Wray has shown (96–132), both the incidence of hookworm disease and the rhetoric employed in public campaigns to eradicate it contributed to stereotypes of the region's rural natives as lazy and listless. These images of diseased or lethargic southern bodies that circulated in national publications around the turn of the twentieth century hark back to the Revolutionary-era representational strategies discussed by Greeson, which linked the region's inhabitants with the physical and moral deficiencies of the colonial tropics.

Moreover, the national celebrity of Alabama's Helen Keller at the turn of the century invites us to consider the role of disability alongside disease in fashioning representations of southernness that performed culturally useful work for the nation. Keller's extreme and excessively embodied form of dependency as blind and deaf, together with her relationship with another regionally coded figure, New England's Anne Sullivan—a relationship based on bonds of affection and instruction—align her, in a grotesque yet also somehow exemplary way, with the white southern heroines of reconciliation romance, a genre that delighted U.S. readers with images of sectional reunion in the decades following the Civil War (see Silber 6–7, 39–65). At the same time, Keller's disability and the uniquely isolated condition in which it placed her point forward to a gallery of southern literary characters with handicaps that threaten to cut them off entirely from meaningful communication and human exchange and to render them living emblems of regional insularity and difference: Faulkner's Benjamin Compson (*The Sound and the Fury*), Jim Bond (*Absalom, Absalom!*), and Isaac Snopes (*The Hamlet*); the

unnamed titular figure of Katherine Anne Porter's "He"; Eudora Welty's Lily Daw ("Lily Daw and the Three Ladies"); Carson McCullers's John Singer (*The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*); Joan Williams's Jake Darby (*The Morning and the Evening*). Indeed, it could be argued that Keller stands at the origin of a twentieth-century tradition of figuring southernness *as* disability, in pointed contrast to the disembodied conventions of democratic citizenship that hold sway in the modern nation.

Riché Richardson's work on representations of southern black masculinity further illustrates the national usefulness of embodied regional alterity. According to Richardson, nineteenth-century images of black men as elderly, asexual Uncle Toms or primitive, hypersexualized beasts were "recast" (4) in the early decades of the twentieth century as geographically specific stereotypes that pathologized the bodies of rural and southern black men as "expendable, degenerate, and biologically inferior" (120). These stereotypes have circulated not only in mainstream U.S. society, abetted by the film and recording industries, print journalism, the military, the medical establishment, and other dominant cultural institutions, but also in African American cultural practices to construct "black men in the South as other to authentic notions of blackness and masculinity" (6) and thus to denigrate "southernness . . . as an undesirable ingredient—even as a contaminant—in black masculine fashioning." In this way, long-standing "ideological views of the South as inferior have been internalized and manifested *within* the category of African Americans" (9–10), valorizing the northern, urban black male body as the proper site and focus of black nationalism and activism (33) in part by marginalizing southern rural blacks, especially men, as "counterrevolutionary and passive" (52). As home to the perceived racial otherness *of* U.S. blackness as well as the perceived regional otherness *within* it, the South has served as the nation's region—and its rural black bodies as the nation's bodies—for the intellectual and political cultures of African America and for U.S. nationalism more broadly, bearing out Richardson's contention that "if the problem of race in the United States . . . has been national in scope, the national problem is also southern at heart" (155). At the same time, as evidenced in particular by Richardson's account of southern hip-hop music (197–227), the South and its black voices continue to harbor a recalcitrant materiality that invites a critical reconsideration of the nation's culturally dominant images of African American identity.

Finally, we should not overlook verbal and (especially) visual representations from the English-speaking world that depict the South explicitly *as* a body, using the human form as an allegorical image of the region as a whole. Such imagery may invoke the Bakhtinian classical body to present the region in heroic terms, as in an 1865 political cartoon by *Punch*'s John Tenniel that portrays both "North" and "South" as manly "American gladiators" engaged

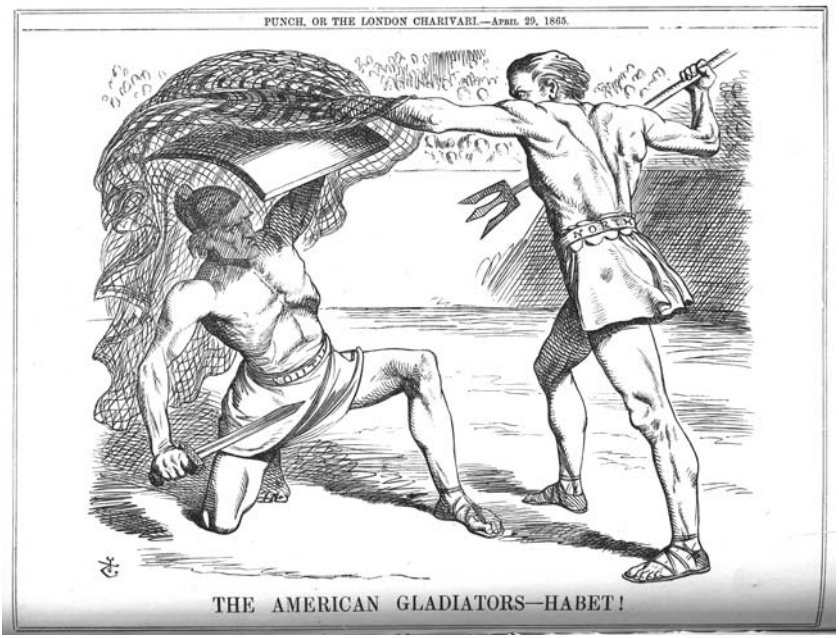


Figure 1. John Tenniel, "The American Gladiators—Habet!" *Punch; or, The London Charivari* (April 25, 1865), p. 173. Courtesy *John Tenniel and the American Civil War* electronic archive.

in single combat (see figure 1), or an 1882 Thomas Nast illustration that pictures "The New South" as a classically draped female form standing before a power loom: a "Queen of Industry" as cotton-mill Columbia (see figure 2).[12] Or it may present a more grotesque and sinister aspect, as in Charles Nelan's 1898 "New War Map of the United States," in which the Carolinas, Florida, and Louisiana appear as, respectively, the eyes, nose, and mouth of Uncle Sam, who gazes covetously at Cuba (see figure 3). Nelan's image allows the nation's imperial designs to be attributed to—projected onto—the sense organs on its regional periphery while the New England or national "mind," represented by the unlabeled northeastern territory concealed beneath Sam's hat, is seemingly unimplicated by comparison. Either way, representations of a bodily U.S. South continued into the twentieth century to serve as powerful, versatile, and sometimes unpredictable tools for the nation to think with.

Rematerializing Southern Literary Studies

My intent over the preceding pages was not to provide an exhaustive inventory of national strategies for constructing a somatic South but rather to demonstrate that southern writers of the twentieth century had ample



Figure 2. Thomas Nast, "The Queen of Industry; or, The New South," *Harper's Weekly* (January 14, 1882), cover illustration. From the author's private collection.

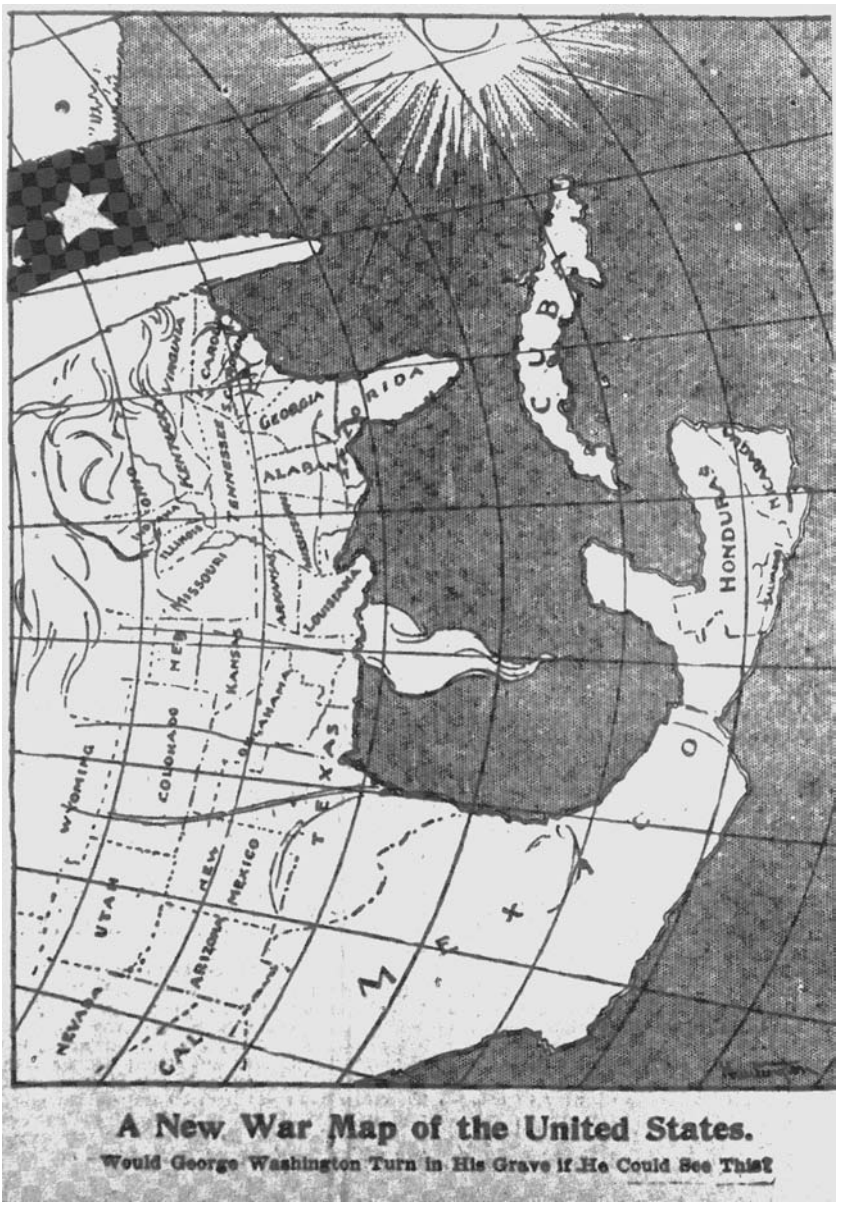


Figure 3. Charles Nelan, "A New War Map of the United States," *New York Herald* (July 31, 1898), sec. 5, p. 8.

precedents for portraying the region and its people in distinctively embodied terms. Indeed, in doing so they were simply taking their cue from the national print culture as a whole. Yet scholars have for the most part been slow to take *their* cue from the writers they study and to focus on the body as a source of insight into the region's deep structures of cultural meaning. Instead, scholarly discussions of southern identity and regional culture have long revolved around the history of ideas. Henry Adams may have helped set the study of the region on this inexorable course when he remarked in *The Education* (1918), apropos of his Harvard classmate Roony Lee, that "[s]trictly, the southerner had no mind" (772). Ever since, southern historians, critics, and other experts have been on the defensive, as their efforts, beginning with the Nashville Agrarians and W. J. Cash, to reconstruct a regional "mind"—a coherent intellectual history and continuous intellectual tradition—clearly and anxiously signal.[13] These efforts have been accompanied by scholarly explications of the shifting geographies of region and the cultural politics of regional distinctiveness; reflections on the politics of authorship and canon formation; analyses of the imaginatively central site and concept of the plantation or of the legacies of slavery, the Civil War, and the Lost Cause; thematic treatments of the roles of place, community, family, memory, history, and the natural environment in southern writing; studies tracing the impact of modernization on southern society and culture; critiques of the culturally dominant ideologies of white supremacy, womanhood, and social class; discourses of pastoralism and honor; studies of the influence of religion and political thought on the artistic and intellectual life of the region; and accounts of ethnic communities or populations and their constitutive contributions to southern culture—approaches that have shaped the definition and study of southern culture for several scholarly generations, and with rich results.[14] But these approaches have also worked at times to divert needed attention from the body work that has throughout southern history served as the material ground of the region's culture and experience. For if southern ways of life have been built upon particular guiding ideas and visions, they have in an even more profound way been built upon, and by, southern bodies.

Our understanding of the U.S. South, then, has been vulnerable to over-intellectualization and over-idealization by scholars. It needs to be rematerialized, returned to the material work performed by southern bodies and the ideological work performed by representations of such bodies in the construction of southern and U.S. culture. Southern bodies, after all, are where southern ideas, including ideas of and about the South itself, ultimately happen.

To understand why this might be so demands a brief foray into Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, which includes a materialist account of the body

as the site, medium, target, and ultimate stake of ideological work. Such an account might at first seem counterintuitive: why focus on bodies in order to explore a phenomenon commonly understood to exist elsewhere, in images, values, concepts, beliefs? Althusser's response, in his 1969–1970 essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," is to attack the commonsense wisdom that pits the blunt facticity of the body against the airy insubstantiality of ideas as itself an ideological construction. To define ideology in metaphysical terms, to assign its representations to an abstract realm of subjectivity and consciousness, is in Althusser's view to produce a mystification. Althusser contends instead that "[i]deology has a material existence" (165). More nearly a field of practice than an autonomous system of signification, it is material in two senses: in its enabling conditions and in its social effects (Coward and Ellis 73, 77).

As Terry Eagleton explains, "Nobody has ever clapped eyes on an ideological formation," because ideology doesn't lend itself so conveniently to isolation and inspection (193). It cannot be found independently of the concrete social institutions (apparatuses) in which it is installed and the concrete social practices governed by those institutions. These practices (shaking hands, saluting, sitting up straight, using the first-person singular, operating a machine, whispering, forming an orderly line, giving or receiving a name, and so on) are immediately material in that they situate the human body in the social formation, orchestrating gestures, directing movements, coordinating interactions. According to Althusser, it is from these gestures, movements, and interactions, more than from the "consciousness" of a "subject," that our ideas and beliefs derive. A person's actions, in other words, don't in any real sense *express* ideas and beliefs; they *give rise* to them and are moreover the only form in which anyone else will ever encounter and evaluate them. Indeed, writes Althusser, a person's ideas simply "are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject" (169; emphasis removed), while consciousness and subjectivity are the mystifying fictions that allow us to imagine our ideas as autonomous products rather than genuinely social ones (167–168). For Althusser, then, the body is the indispensable matrix of ideology. It is the site where ideological practice occurs, since that practice ultimately consists in situating bodies. And it is the medium through which ideological meaning is realized, since its physical attitudes and stances generate ideas. Where the body goes, the mind will follow.

The body is also the *stake* of ideological practice in that the primary aim of all ideology is the reproduction of the basic social and economic relations that allow social formations to exist and perpetuate themselves. These "relations of production," which form our "real conditions of existence" (Al-

thusser 162), have a material basis in the bodies of men and women concretely positioned amid society's productive forces, bodies laboring in homes, fields, offices, factories, or universities, as workers, parents, managers, intellectuals, politicians, and so on. The trouble is that our real conditions of existence are also so complex as to defy practical comprehension, and typically so exploitive that few who genuinely understood them would continue to tolerate them. By threatening to undermine "purposive social life" altogether, these epistemological and political problems jeopardize the reproduction of the social order (Eagleton 143). Ideology's indispensable task is to neutralize such difficulties, to make social existence intelligible, social practice possible, and exploitation invisible and "natural." In Althusser's much-quoted formulation, "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162). By "imaginary" Althusser designates a relationship that is at once fictional, an approximation of the real, and material, an approximation lived *as* real with real consequences. As Paul Hirst puts it, the subject of ideology "exists in the realm of the 'as if,' but it lives these relations *as if* they were true . . . and through the 'as if' [ideology] really does have a determinate effect" on real conditions (34), most often to legitimate or otherwise reinforce them. Ideology's stake in the body is that its success can only be measured in terms of the body's ability to perform effective, appropriate social functions in its real conditions, allowing the material structure of society to remain stable and its material work to go on. Where ideology clears a path, the body will follow.

Finally, the human body has throughout history been one of the principal targets of ideology. One of the most common ways in which ideology stages social relations is by directly assigning normative values to bodies within a social field that is also, of course, a field of power. Ideology marks bodies as superior or inferior, sufficient or lacking, familiar or alien, pure or corrupt, desirable or repulsive, visible or invisible, central or marginal. Its representations often take the body as their explicit referent, singling it out for praise or ridicule, privilege or punishment, preservation or destruction. In working with bodies, then, ideology also works *against* them, inscribing a cultural story of power, legitimacy, and difference *on* bodies as it differentiates them into beneficiaries and victims, subjects and objects, "us" and "them."

With Althusser's insights in mind, I intend *Reading for the Body* to help move the critical discussion of southern literature toward a more detailed and thoroughgoing attention to the material and cultural work performed by, through, and on southern bodies. This book can be seen as a response to the call issued by Houston A. Baker Jr. and Dana Nelson in their 2001 special issue of *American Literature* for a "new" and theoretically informed version of southern studies sensitive to the long-standing, intimate, and constitutive relations between the body and the histories, cultures, and literatures of

the U.S. South (234–235, 243). Another reference point for the kind of criticism I will do here can be found in the work of gender studies scholars who have foregrounded southern bodies as crucial sites for the construction, negotiation, and contestation of identity in the region. Diane Roberts's *Myth of Aunt Jemima* (1994), for example, is an important study of the ideological function and bodily focus of gender stereotyping and the transgressive power of the Bakhtinian grotesque body in women's narratives about the South.[15] Similarly, the essays gathered in Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson's *Haunted Bodies: Gender in Southern Texts* (1997) explore how the South's governing hierarchies, dichotomies, and cultural logics are structured by a discourse of bodies: how southern bodies become texts in their own right, bearing "inscriptions of age-old stories" of identity and power that circulate gendered meanings (Donaldson and Jones 17). Throughout Jones and Donaldson's volume, the body's methodological role is to guide the critic to gender as a still-undervalued "analytic category" (3) for thinking about the U.S. South. Here, I will take the body itself as my primary analytic category in a series of readings that take up questions of gender, much as they take up Baker and Nelson's questions of violence, without making either an exclusive focus. The work of these critics has been invaluable to me for the seriousness with which it approaches the body as a window onto a wide spectrum of cultural problems, codes, and meanings. Yet *Reading for the Body* may find its truest precursor as a work of southern studies scholarship in Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire* (2000) and the impressive group of stand-alone essays that complement that groundbreaking book. Yaeger's theoretical nimbleness, resourcefulness, and eclecticism; her scrupulous attention to the politics and psychology of southern embodiment; the large-spiritedness with which she compiles her rich archive of problems and issues attendant on that embodiment; and, not least of all, her eye for the grotesque, gargantuan, and seismic in southern writing—all have served as models and inspirations for my critical practice.

The chapters that follow experiment with a variety of theoretical and historicist approaches to the problem of the body and embodied experiences in twentieth-century narratives of the U.S. South. I focus on literary narratives, primarily novels and short stories, less for any strict documentation they might be thought to provide on social and historical conditions in the region than for the potential they offer for deep imaginative engagement, on the part of writers and readers, with constitutive cultural patterns, meanings, values, forces, and experiences, including (and perhaps especially) the experience of embodiment both within and against social life. Because I wish to foreground the interplay between regional (and national) social formations and the recalcitrant materiality of regional bodies, the theoretical framework I employ rests for the most part on versions of materialism: the Marxist and neo-Marxist thought of Althusser and Colette Guillaumin; the material cul-

ture theory and philosophy of the somatic developed by Elaine Scarry; the trauma theory of Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and others; the materialist media theory associated with German scholar Friedrich Kittler; the provocative mimicry of essentialist gender discourse performed by Luce Irigaray; and the materialist critique of war formulated by feminist theorists such as Cynthia Enloe, Sara Ruddick, Nancy Huston, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Carol Adams.

I also draw on the social history of intensely embodied experiences, such as illness, pregnancy, childbirth, and combat, and I examine the representational histories of ideologically freighted bodily features, such as hands and blood. This historical specificity helps us avoid the methodological pitfall of appealing to an abstract, monolithic theoretical body and thus in effect disembodying "the" body in the very attempt to employ "it" as an analytical tool—a strategy Castronovo might dub necro theory.[16] This is a problem that sometimes surfaces in the work of Althusser and Scarry, for example. So in staging encounters like the one in chapter 4 between Scarry's theoretical writings and the literary art of Richard Wright, I will not just "apply" theory to literature but also listen as literature talks back to theory, from its deep fund of wisdom about the situatedness and sensual density of every human body in its lived particularity. My hope is that in the resulting dialogues, southern bodies will offer a revealing window onto the problems, complexities, and cultural logics informing lives and identities in the twentieth-century U.S. South.

The seven chapters that follow are arranged in two sections and a coda. Part 1, "Bodily Attributes," focuses on the representation of specific physical features of the body. Chapter 1, "Manual Discourse: A Problem in Mark Twain's America," examines how a wide range of representations and discourses concerning the human hand converge in Twain's 1893 novel, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, to unsettle fictions of identity, agency, and epistemology—especially racial epistemology—at work in the text's antebellum Missouri setting. Chapter 2, "Listening for Zora: Voice, Body, and the Mediat(iz)ed Modernism of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Moses, Man of the Mountain*," explores two of Zora Neale Hurston's novels from the 1930s to demonstrate how her literary depictions of voice are mediated by the new sound technologies that entered mass culture during her formative years, troubling the relationship between voice and body, body and subjectivity, and subjectivity and voice for her vernacular characters. Chapter 3, "Writing Blood: The Art of the Literal in William Faulkner's *Light in August*," traces the resistant logic behind the stubbornly nonfigurative appearances of human blood in Faulkner's seventh novel, where repeated scenes of bleeding work to challenge and demystify the racialized discourse of "blood" that helped underwrite the violence and inequality of Jim Crow social relations.

Part 2, "Embodied Experiences," centers on lived experiences that display profound sentient dimensions. Chapter 4, "Richard Wright's Parables of Pain: *Uncle Tom's Children* and the Making and Unmaking of a Southern Black World," examines the explicitly repressive applications of coercive force in service of the Jim Crow regime that capitalized on the world-destroying properties of physical pain. Yet for some of Wright's more mature protagonists, torture and injury trigger not only unmaking but also making: resourceful and even revolutionary responses to suffering that reveal the body to be a crucial pivot point where power can be challenged or co-opted as well as imposed. Chapter 5, "Difficult Embodiment: Coming of Age in Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda Stories," focuses on Porter's use of illness narratives to demystify the reigning cultural fictions of beauty, dependency, and weakness that attended and shaped the maturation process for white girls in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South. Chapter 6, "Reading War on the Body: The Example of Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*," posits embodiment as a crucial resource in the quest to understand the experience of war. Mason's 1985 novel traces a bodily epistemology of war from the battlefield to the home front, from wartime to a dubious peacetime, and from the somatic experiences of male combatants to those of female civilians, who find they are not exempt from the pervasive material and cultural effects of militarization.

Finally, "Overreading (for) the Body: Walker Percy's Cautionary Tale," approaches Percy's 1977 novel, *Lancelot*, as an admonitory fable in which strategies of reading for the body—including some of the very approaches I will develop in the coming chapters—turn misguided, violent, and paranoid. Thus, this chapter by design works against the grain of the rest of the book, implicitly acknowledging that the reading program developed in parts 1 and 2 has its own limits and blind spots, that the southern bodies that I have elsewhere insisted *must* be read can also be overread or misread, with potentially (indeed, in *Lancelot*, apocalyptically) far-reaching consequences.

I aim for this to be an expansive book, but it bears no pretense of being an exhaustive one. To place human bodies in the foreground of the critical enterprise—to make them, methodologically, bodies that matter—is a strategy with the potential to alter, sometimes radically, the way we read virtually any text, any literature. The writings of the twentieth-century U.S. South are no exception. So if the authors examined in this study carry on a centuries-old tradition of framing and scrutinizing the region through the stubborn materialities of the body, they are hardly alone among their contemporaries in doing so. Elsewhere, for example, I have examined Lillian Smith's appeals to, and investments in, the bodies of southern children as counter-ideological resources in the struggle against Jim Crow (see Watson, "Uncovering"). By the same token, one can easily imagine a place for Flannery O'Connor, James

Weldon Johnson, Erskine Caldwell, Harriette Arnow, Eudora Welty, Linda Hogan, Alice Walker, or John Kennedy Toole in a study such as this one—and a long book would grow even longer, perhaps endless. I feel fortunate that colleagues in the fields of U.S. southern and American studies have already begun to write the missing "chapters" in that more comprehensive project, and it is my hope to contribute a few more of them myself in the years ahead.

A similar caveat applies to my methodology. My aim here is not to promote a monolithic theoretical approach and then apply it over and over to different literary works. Rather, the goal is to experiment with different ways of thinking about the body materially and of thinking about representations of the body historically and socially, in something like a series of case studies that collectively illustrate both the power, range, and flexibility of reading (for) the body as a broad, eclectic methodological strategy *and* the potential of a highly embodied U.S. literature to serve as a window onto the pressing questions, challenges, and crises that faced twentieth-century regional and national cultures. That caveat bears repeating: *Reading for the Body* is as much critical casebook as scholarly monograph. Believing the story of the U.S. South to be in large part the story of its bodies, I have sought to create a book that listens to and for that story in diverse and surprising ways.

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CHAPTER ONE

Manual Discourse

A Problem in Mark Twain's America

A criminal's most treacherous tools are his own hands and feet.
—Andre Moenssens, fingerprint expert

They have used my hand as the instrument to convey their own thoughts.
—Dr. Dexter, on the spirits

Just as man is governed, in religion, by the products of his own brain, so, in capitalist production, he is governed by the products of his own hand.
—Karl Marx

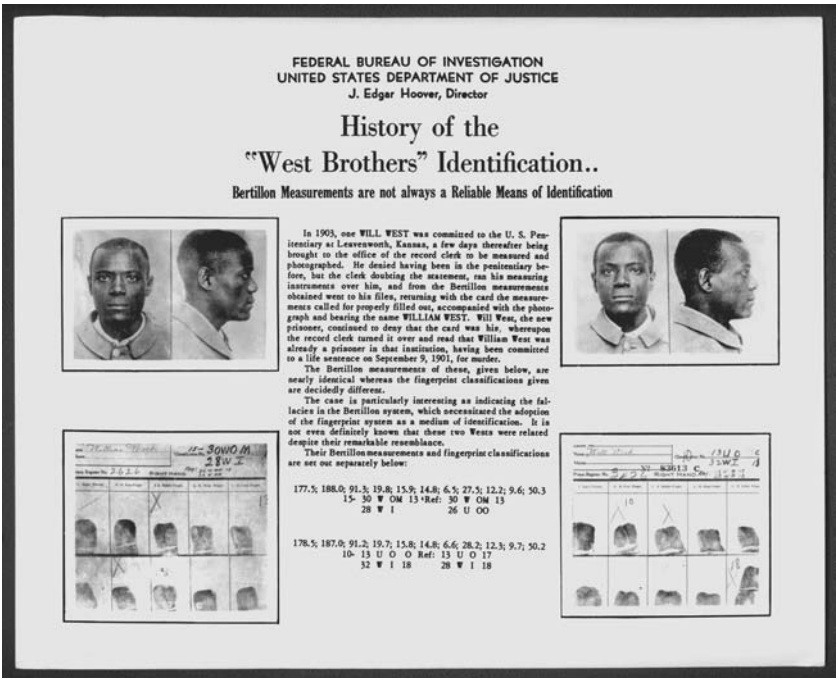
Why, a man's own hand is his deadliest enemy!
—Mark Twain

In 1903 the practice of personal identification began a paradigm shift in America. It started with the arrival of a new inmate, Will West, at the federal penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas. In processing West, the prison's identification bureau followed the anthropometric method developed less than a quarter century before by Alphonse Bertillon (1853–1914) in Paris. Anthropometry, or *Bertillonage*, as it was also called, had quickly become the reigning method of personal identification in U.S. prisons. Typically supplemented by the powerful new technology of photography (Sekula 26–30), it organized precise bodily data (length of the head, foot, middle finger, and ear, height of the torso, eye color—up to a dozen such measurements) under an elaborate classification scheme capable of handling over a million possible combinations. Checking West's Bertillon measurements against filed data, however, prison officials made a shocking, unprecedented discovery: a man with virtually identical measurements, "so similar that the insignificant differences might well be attributed to inaccuracy" (Moenssens, *Fingerprint Techniques* 20), was already incarcerated at Leavenworth, serving a life sentence for murder. Prison photographs proved equally unhelpful; the two men looked unnervingly alike. And the other inmate's name? William West.

This was an institutional nightmare worthy of Poe, by way of Foucault: a penal apparatus that disciplines as it punishes, and disciplines in large part by using information to cultivate a manipulable individuality in each prisoner, suddenly finds itself unable to differentiate between an inmate and his uncanny double.[1] According to the prison archive, the two Wests were identical, though apparently not twins. It might even be argued that from a bureaucratic perspective they were simply the *same man*, as if the basic phenomenal hallmarks of an "individual" identity—morphology, name—could be distributed to multiple bodies or duplicated exactly from one to another. Or, to put it another way, it was as if the unique constellation of somatic features and linguistic signifiers understood in classical terms as a "person" were revealed to harbor uncanny excesses of body, agency, and voice. Under such conditions, the concept and structure of identity—not to mention the implications for law enforcement—become truly vertiginous. For even if circumstantial evidence pointed to William West as the author of a crime, how could anyone determine which man was responsible? How could anyone know whodunnit?

As it turned out, the nightmare was short-lived. For where Bertillonage and photography had failed, another identification technique, still in its institutional infancy, would prove successful. When the Wests were fingerprinted, prison officials could argue that they at last had material (and not simply circumstantial) evidence that the two inmates were not the same man (see figure 4). By reading a nonduplicable identity from the surface of the body, they were able to recover two nonidentical individuals from what must have seemed a sprawling, undifferentiated fund of subjectivity and (pun firmly intended) Will. Within months, the penitentiary at Leavenworth had "abandoned the Bertillon system and beg[u]n fingerprinting inmates" (D. Fisher 130). Other prisons and law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, quickly followed suit. Within a few decades, fingerprinting had not only gained hegemony in the U.S. criminal justice system but had, in the era of the gangster and the G-man, entered American popular consciousness as law enforcement's most potent weapon in fighting crime.

The West incident, which forensic scientist Andre Moenssens calls "the death knell for anthropometry" (*Fingerprint Techniques* 20), was one of the pivotal moments in the history of fingerprinting in America.[2] With disciplinary effectiveness and scientific credibility on the line, the authorities at Leavenworth made their epistemological wager: that the metaphysical concept of the person could be once and forever (af)fixed to the physical contours of the human hand.[3] Fingerprinting thus gained an institutional handhold in America by suturing over an acute crisis of identity and reason, anchoring those crucial but abstract concepts in what Elaine Scarry calls the incontestable reality associated with the body (*The Body* 56).


FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
J. Edgar Hoover, Director

History of the
"West Brothers" Identification..

Bertillon Measurements are not always a Reliable Means of Identification

In 1903, one WILL. WEST was committed to the U. S. Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas, a few days thereafter being brought to the office of the record clerk to be measured and photographed. He denied having been in the penitentiary before, but the clerk doubting the statement, ran his measuring instruments over him, and from the Bertillon measurements obtained went to his files, returning with the card the measurements called for properly filled out, accompanied with the photograph and bearing the name WILLIAM WEST. Will West, the new prisoner, continued to deny that the card was his, whereupon the record clerk turned it over and read that William West was already a prisoner in that institution, having been committed to a life sentence on September 9, 1901, for murder.

The Bertillon measurements of these, given below, are nearly identical whereas the fingerprint classifications given are decidedly different.

The case is particularly interesting as indicating the fallacies in the Bertillon system, which necessitated the adoption of the fingerprint system as a medium of identification. It is not even definitely known that these two Wests were related despite their remarkable resemblance.

Their Bertillon measurements and fingerprint classifications are set out separately below:

177.5; 188.0; 91.3; 19.8; 15.9; 14.8; 6.5; 27.5; 12.2; 9.6; 50.3
15- 30 W OM 13 Ref: 30 W OM 13
28 W I 26 U OO

178.5; 187.0; 91.2; 19.7; 15.8; 14.8; 6.6; 28.2; 12.3; 9.7; 50.2
10- 13 U O O Ref: 13 U O 17
32 W I 18 28 W I 18

Figure 4. "History of the 'West Brothers' Identification," circa 1960. 2008.40.26. Gift of Brian Hollstein. Collection of the National Law Enforcement Museum, Washington, D.C.

The year 1903 also brought resolution to an ongoing crisis in the life of Mark Twain. After more than a decade of financial insolvency, during which he had moved his household to Europe to reduce expenses, endured the twin collapses of his publishing house, Charles L. Webster and Co., and the Paige typesetting machine, and declared personal bankruptcy, Twain in October finalized a publishing arrangement with Harper that made him, once again, a rich man. "The contract," he exulted in his notebook, "concentrates all my books in Harper's hands, and now at last they are valuable; in fact they are a fortune. They *guarantee* me $25,000 a year for 5 years, but they will yield twice as much [as] that for many a year, if intelligently handled" (*Mark Twain's Correspondence* 540n1). Flush with this sudden wealth and good fortune, Twain paused in his notebook to recall an event that had given him hope in his hour of greatest financial jeopardy: a palm reading by the most famous fortune-teller of his generation:

> In 1895 the palmist Cheiro examined my hand and said that in my 68th year (1903) I would become suddenly rich. I was a bankrupt and $94,000 in debt at the time, through the failure of Chas. L. Webster and Co. Two years later—in Lon-

don—Cheiro repeated this long-distance prediction, and added that the riches would come from a quite unexpected source.

I am superstitious. I kept the prediction in mind and often thought of it. When at last it came true, Oct. 22,/03 [*sic*], there was but a month and 9 days to spare.

Writing of this same encounter, Cheiro (the pseudonym of Louis Hamon, 1866–1936) would stress the "humiliating accuracy" with which, by Twain's own admission, the palmist had "exposed [the writer's] character" (155), but the numerous accounts of the reading that Twain left in his letters and journals all suggest that he was and remained far more absorbed with the prognostic than with the diagnostic content of the session. During the economic convulsion and drift of the mid-1890s, Twain seized on Cheiro's predictions in order to shore up a battered self-image and restore a personal narrative of precipitous decline and near-ruin to its properly American upward trajectory. It was his personal version of what historian Robert Wiebe has characterized as the larger "search for order" taking place in U.S. society generally amid the dramatic social and economic transformations of the era. In his recourse to the lines and folds of his own hand as a source of stability, reassurance, and even sanity in the face of gnawing uncertainties about personal integrity, the Missouri author seems to anticipate the Leavenworth authorities.

The turmoil of 1895 was by no means simply economic, of course. An atmosphere of racial crisis hung over America, especially in the South, where racially motivated lynching had reached epidemic proportions and Jim Crow had acquired legal and institutional status. The rapidly modernizing and industrializing regional society created a volatile mixture of economic entanglement and intense competition between white and black southerners, fanning the flames of racial conflict. To many southern whites, the African American quest for economic opportunity, social equality, and political empowerment in the wake of emancipation was an immensely destabilizing force, an apocalyptic threat to their livelihood, their culture, and the racialized foundations of their regional (and, increasingly, their national) identity. They responded with legal and extralegal violence that threatened to leave the nation once more, as Lincoln said four decades earlier, a house divided.

With the stability and moral intelligibility of American character and culture thus very much on the line, Booker T. Washington became an instant celebrity by offering the anxious nation a reassuring and comprehensible image of itself, one that seemed to reconcile the contradictory elements of national life then looming so large in the South. In his Atlanta Exposition address of September 18, 1895, Washington presented a large interracial audience with a vision of economic cooperation and social separation between the races as the key to regional harmony, progress, and prosperity. His rhetorical master stroke was to condense this abstract, controversial vision into a familiar, non-

controversial metaphor: "In all things that are purely social," he proclaimed, "we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress" (221–222).

For Washington, the president of an industrial institute, as for Karl Marx, who posited economic development as the motor of social development, the image of the hand would doubtless have evoked the transformative power of manual labor, the productive capacity shared by all southerners regardless of race and moreover the ground upon which they might meet in pursuit of "mutual progress."[4] And it was precisely this concerted economic effort of black and white citizens united in their productive capacities that Washington linked in his speech with the fundamental oneness of the hand. As a symbol of labor, then, the hand pointed the way directly toward the interracial economic cooperation it also symbolized. But it was at the same time a hand divided against itself, a doubly articulated site, whose fingers—as if already anticipating the individualizing thrust of fingerprint technology—troublingly reintroduced a divisive politics of identity into the politics of common cause, subjecting the collective economic action Washington envisioned to troubling social and racial inflections. For if the hand, according to Washington, verges on transcending or at least reconciling racial difference, the fingers become the very site and sign of racial difference.[5]

Its organic unity suggesting an integrated economy and polity, its opposable digits suggesting the racial stratifications of a segregated society, Washington's singular/plural hand embodies the constitutive tensions of the post-Reconstruction United States (see Sundquist, *To Wake* 251–252). Already intrinsic to any federal union, where central authority rests on the coordinated interactions of opposable members, such tensions—between the one and the many ("E Pluribus Unum" nicely captures the working relationship between fingers and hand), identity and difference, economic and social goals—were only heightened by the violent racial antagonism of the period. Yet the potential for contradiction, even grotesquerie, in Washington's somatic trope seems to have gone uncommented beneath the triumphalist strains of his rhetoric; apparently—and here is Washington's coup as an orator—the immediacy and basic coherence of the hand image were enough to preempt doubt and smooth over contradiction in the minds of his listeners.

Indeed, Washington seems to have been taking no chances on that score. Contemporary accounts of the Atlanta address indicate that he punctuated the climax of his speech with a dramatic visual gesture. James Creelman, a correspondent for the New York *World*, reported to his readers that Washington "held his dusky hand high above his head, with the fingers stretched wide apart," as he delivered the crucial lines (qtd. in B. Washington 240). With that elevated hand, the hand of a man who had traveled up from slavery, Washington, speaking at what historians refer to as the "nadir" of African

American history, sought to counter the downward drift of contemporary race relations, offering his own body (and no doubt the nationalist overtones of his surname as well) as a performative image of the nation's rightful upward and united course.[6]

Manual Concepts

What these three episodes from turn-of-the-century America have in common, beyond a nervous and modern sense of identity, society, value, and reason in flux, is an equally nervous recourse to the physical or thematic properties of the hand as a way to repair (or disavow) fault lines in those established meaning systems. The paradox of organic unity in digital diversity; the localization and embodiment of intention, agency, and productive capacity; the authority and continuity of the body and its material (or, in the palmist's case, immaterial) links with character, history, even destiny—these elements of what we might call a "manual discourse" figured prominently in numerous contemporary efforts to reinstate identity, reimagine society, ground meaning and value, restore reason, and in general rescue order from chaos.

Other examples also demonstrate this intellectual trend. "Manual Concepts," an 1892 article by American anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing, posits the hand as the *primum mobile* behind the emergence and development of a distinctively human intelligence. Citing various cultural practices from a number of early European and Mesoamerican societies, Cushing attempts to demonstrate that the ancient systems of enumeration, spatial orientation, and communication that served as building blocks for our own signifying practices originated in ideographic and sometimes virtually iconic representations of finger positions, hand signals, and other manual activities (see figure 5). He even grounds human reason itself, "conscious ratiocination," in the hand, in the manual labor of "making an environment of [one's] own" and "warding off the blows of nature with [one's] hands" that arose as the human species began "to develop extra-naturally" (289). Almost single-handedly, then, the hand lifted human "mentation" from the instinctual to the rational, as the struggle for survival was supplemented by the search for truth: "man attained to both the perception and formal ascertainment of truth first through the *use* and then through the *using* of his hands" (290). "Hand-usage" is thus the crucial activity in "framing mind" itself (291), as in Cushing's account of the origin of numerical systems: "the need for knowing in number arising in primitive time, *they* [the hands] first responded; the will to know, *they* formed the way of knowing—the knowledge itself, for that matter." Tellingly, the hands occupy the grammatical subject position in this passage; in Cushing's anthropological myth of origins, the hand is the constitutive subject of human history, the progenitor and midwife of culture itself,

each time he would determine their collective value in any given number. It is curious that his first effort to meet this requirement was but a repetition of the method employed by the primitive Zuñi in formulating his word or sound-symbol for the same number. To denote the finger-count for this number (four), the latter said, "all of the fingers [of the left hand] all but done with;" that is, all ex-



FIG. 16.



FIG. 17.



FIG. 18.

cept the last, the one before, or the one lacking the last. Practically, the Latin or the pre-Latin scribe did this, too, in formulating his symbol of the same number; for, conceiving the whole hand held up with the thumb extended as representative of five (Fig. 20) and then adopting or making a V to represent this in turn, he has placed an I before his V to symbolize four, by indicating that the number



FIG. 19.



FIG. 20.

meant is the next to the last one of the first division or hand; in other words, the one before, or one less than five, namely, four (Fig. 19). Moreover, when the fingers are held up with the thumb clasped in, they are so separated as to suggest, in themselves, the figure IV. Precisely as the Zuñi went on from the "notch" or V,

Figure 5. Manual origins of roman numerals. Frank Hamilton Cushing, "Manual Concepts: A Study of the Influence of Hand-Usage on Culture-Growth," *American Anthropologist* 5.4 (October 1892): 298.

"engender[ing] and attend[ing] at the birth of not only all primitive arts, but also many primitive institutions" (308). In the study of hand usage Cushing thus finds an "embryology" of all human meaning-making (309). The hand is father to (the) man.

Cushing might have found a loose but powerful analogy for his account of human cultural phylogeny in the unforgettable ontogenesis of Helen Keller, whose *Story of My Life* (1902) recounts her breakthrough into language in the spring of 1887, a breakthrough achieved through the explicit physical mediation of the hands (14–17). In a scene later immortalized for American audiences in the stage and film versions of *The Miracle Worker*, the blind, deaf Helen awakens to "the mystery of language" when her teacher, Anne Sullivan, places one of the girl's hands beneath a gushing stream of well water and manually spells the word "w-a-t-e-r," "first slowly, then rapidly," into her other hand (16). As meaning emerges on and through her body, Helen's hands perform a double grounding function, anchoring the arbitrariness of linguistic signifiers in the palpable density of a material, referential world, even as they stabilize the flowing continuity of that world, its undifferentiated "still[ness]" and "dark[ness]," in the shared social signification of articulated language. On one hand, the sign. And quite literally on the other hand, the referent. And thus, in and across these hands, a concrete emblem of the human capacity to yoke the two in an arc of signification.[7]

Keller depicts her entry into language as an ascension to full humanity from sub- or prehuman darkness and irrationality. By her own description, she was a feral child, given to tantrums and other "outbursts of passion" (11); her parents brought in Sullivan in large part because Helen had grown too wild for them to manage alone (11–13). Keller's "finger language" (11), then, which under Sullivan's tutelage gradually progresses from "uncomprehending," "monkey-like imitation" (15) to a vehicle for complex thought and expression, lifts her not only figuratively "out of Egypt" (14) but literally out of savagery and animality, "restor[ing]" her to her "human heritage" (11). Or as Cushing might put it, her "mentation" evolves from instinctual to rational, fully human, first through the use and then through the using of her hands.[8] Small wonder, then, that for the mature Keller the hands of others become the truest indices of their personality and character: "The hands of those I meet are dumbly eloquent to me" (100).

In at least one instance, the hand played a leading role in introducing, domesticating, and popularizing one of the uncanny and potentially unnerving new technologies of the late nineteenth century. In the scientific folklore that emerged around Wilhelm Röntgen's discovery of X-rays in 1895, the crucial breakthrough is a serendipitous accident, in which the scientist, having inadvertently moved his hand between a cathode ray tube and a cardboard screen, saw the bones of his fingers and hand projected onto the screen. Perhaps

realizing the potential of that specific image to point to practical applications for the weird new phenomenon and to defuse its alien menace, Röntgen appended an X-ray photograph of his wife's hand to the pioneering paper on X-rays he circulated to his scientific colleagues. The print was quickly taken up by the popular as well as scholarly press and went on to become the iconic image of X-ray photography in the technology's infancy. What is more, according to Sara Danius, this manual imagery entered the wider culture in the form of consumer goods and "tokens of sentimental value; New York women of fashion had their hands photographed in order to prove that bone structure makes a hand beautiful; and an X-ray print of mother's hand became a popular family souvenir" (78). In this way, the quotidian immediacy and familiarity of the hand—along with, in this specific case, its explicitly gendered overtones of marriage, motherhood, and domesticity—helped contemporary subjects come to intellectual and emotional grips with the mysterious forces at work in an ever more dynamic and uncertain modern universe.

In presenting this contemporary recourse to the hand as a characteristic discursive strategy of the period—one by no means limited to Twain, Washington, Cushing, Keller, Röntgen, or the officials at Leavenworth, who will be joined in the pages ahead by a gallery of unlikely figures from Victorian-era America and Europe—I do not mean to suggest that it was historically unprecedented, for as Katherine Rowe convincingly demonstrates, representations of the hand have done important cultural work at numerous points in Euro-American history, often in periods of "intense innovation" or political, social, or epistemological upheaval (13). It was certainly, however, a historically *motivated* practice, which emerged with peculiar frequency in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, where hands of all sorts were acutely in crisis.

Given Twain's eager embrace of a palmist's prophecy as a talisman against personal ruin, it is perhaps surprising to encounter a palpable aura of crisis surrounding the hand in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, his most important work of the 1890s. Twain began writing the manuscript in the summer of 1892, serialized the novel in *Century* magazine beginning in December 1893, and published it in book form late in 1894. It was thus the work that most preoccupied him during the dark period of financial insolvency and personal self-doubt leading up to his encounter with Cheiro. That darkness, as yet unallayed by Cheiro's predictions, is perhaps reflected in the intense scrutiny and skepticism that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* directs toward the hand. The scrutiny is largely the work of the novel's eponymous protagonist, the once-and-future lawyer David Wilson, who reads palms, records and catalogs "finger-marks" (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 7), and exhibits an unshakeable faith in the hand as a source of order, knowledge, and justice. At the sensational 1853 murder trial that caps the novel, Wilson thrills an audience of impressionable small-town Missou-

rians by drawing upon an idiosyncratic, strategically mystified hermeneutic of the hand in order to assign discrete identities to a pair of otherwise indistinguishable men, thus beating the Leavenworth identification officers to the punch by a full fifty years—and incidentally rendering anthropometry already obsolete in the year of Bertillon's birth![9] This courtroom coup leads in turn to a dramatic reversal of Wilson's personal fortunes not unlike the one Cheiro would read from Twain's hand in the year following the novel's publication. Moreover, Wilson's forensic oratory anticipates Washington's Atlanta address in the way it uses both verbal and gestural cues to focus an interracial audience on the physical features of the hand, and in the soothing prospect of restoration and order that such features ultimately offer a regional community torn apart by economic and racial crises.

The Authorial Hand

Twain's well-known account of the novel's genesis seems to present the authorial hand in similarly heroic terms. Twain initially planned an exuberant farce detailing the exploits of Siamese twins whose "two heads and four arms joined to a single body and a single pair of legs" (*Pudd'nhead* 119) would allow him to wreak havoc with familiar paradigms of identity, intention, agency, and embodiment. The project, however, soon acquired a parallel plot that rendered the tale fully as grotesque and self-divided as its original protagonist(s): "it was not one story," Twain wrote, "but two stories tangled together; and they obstructed and interrupted each other at every turn and created no end of confusion and annoyance" (119). To publish the manuscript, Twain feared, was to risk "unseat[ing] the reader's reason." His solution was what he tellingly labeled "a kind of literary Caesarian [*sic*] operation," in which he pulled the farce "out by the roots" and concentrated in revision on the "tragedy" that remained, now called "Pudd'nhead Wilson."[10] Another pass of the editorial scalpel transformed the Siamese twins of the original manuscript into the relatively canny fraternal twins of the published novel ("I took those twins apart and made two separate men of them"; 122)—the third time that we have seen discrete subjects manu-factured out of hopelessly entangled identities. To rescue the text from madness, to salvage readerly reason, Twain felt it necessary to employ a vigorous, discriminating authorial hand. At the same time, his surgical trope links that hand, and the rationalizing "operations" it performs, with an invasive violence.

This suggests that the hands of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, including the author's own, ultimately create far more problems of identity, epistemology, and community than they alleviate. I will put it more forcefully: far from seating or salvaging reason, or being secured by it, the hand in Twain's last great novel works to introduce what Daniel Cottom in his study of spiritualism and sur-

realism calls an "abyss of reason," a telltale gap or fissure in the constitutive order of reason, in the constellation of founding assumptions, repressions, and exclusions without which reason could not *be* reason, could not be reasonable. Cottom contends that reason establishes and maintains itself as a mode of knowledge by systematically excluding inconsistency, simultaneity, contradiction, immateriality, nonrepeatability, excess, emotion, intuition, and opinion—all of which it lumps together and dismisses under the rubric of the "irrational." As an affront to reason, however, the irrational also performs a critique of reason, exposing both the coercive force and the self-imposed austerity with which reason circumscribes a field of valid knowledge. In Twain's novel, this critical irrationality resides above all in the recalcitrant materiality of the human hand, from which it periodically arises to unsettle the main story line, which Russ Castronovo might recognize as a fable of necro citizenship, the abstract, universalizing, disembodied model of national belonging that dominated nineteenth-century U.S. political culture (16–23; and see "The Nation's Bodies" section of my introduction). *Pudd'nhead Wilson* offers a chiasmatic version of this fable in which one character's bid to regain the privileges of national belonging and another character's abrupt plunge beyond its pale appear to hinge upon the public performance of rational mastery. As we shall see, however, this performance is ultimately compromised, like the civic identity it seeks to underwrite and confer, by the irrepressible, irreconcilable, and often irrational excesses of southern—and especially *slave*—bodies.

Similar ironies surround the novel's murder plot, in which an exotic Indian dagger, shaped with particular care to fit the contours of the user's hand, turns that hand into a deadly cutting instrument directed against a local paragon of reason, honor, and probity, who is also, not coincidentally, revered for his "generous hand" (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 112). This episode not only sends us back to the acts of authorial cutting that produced the novel in the first place; it also hints at the pervasive ways in which the hands of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, in their recalcitrance at rational identification, differentiation, classification, and consistency, tear open, and thus lay bare, not just the human body but the violent discursive regime of reason itself. Whereas Cushing saw the hand as the basis of rational thought and enumeration, Twain's novel suggests that hands cannot serve as reason's instruments without also becoming reason's assailants—and victims.

The novel gets under way with a prefatory "Whisper to the Reader" that invokes a putatively sovereign hand, the author's own, in order to guarantee the authenticity of the "law-chapters" and "court scene" (1) to come—the material that will deal most closely with Wilson and his "manual" forensics. After confirming that "[t]hese chapters are right now, in every detail, for they were re-written under the immediate eye of William Hicks, who studied law

part of a while in southwest Missouri thirty-five years ago and then came over here to Florence for his health and is still helping for exercise and board in Macaroni and Vermicelli's horse-feed shed," Twain concludes his shaggy-dog story with a legalistic flourish: "Given under my hand this second day of January, 1893, at the Villa Viviani, village of Settignano, three miles back of Florence, on the hills" (2). For all its purported intent of grounding the chapters that follow in the authenticity of an authorial subject, an authenticity imaged in the pledging, writing, signing, and creating activity of the authorial hand, this rhetorical gesture undoes itself by identifying its source as "Mark Twain," a nom de plume itself designating a notoriously/gloriously divided identity. The hand that would attest to the veracity of the text before us, in other words, is the same hand that lies about the author's identity in penning the pen name.[11]

"Given under my hand," of course, also resembles the phrasing of a last will and testament. It thus flirts uneasily with evoking an already dead subject, the spirit hand of an authorial revenant, haunting the textual performance rather than stabilizing or legitimating it. The hand under which a will and testament is "given" has by definition succumbed to destiny rather than, like the audacious hand of Wilson's calendar entry, mastered it; and though it may attempt by means of the legal institution of mortmain to extend its mastery beyond death, the victory is at best Pyrrhic.[12] The decedent's hand, after all, has a figurative, discursive existence only; it enters the public sphere, becoming materially effective and legally empowered, only on condition that the actual hand, the testator's body, no longer harbors the potential for agency. For, were the testator's living hand present to perform the material work of distribution, punishment, or reward, the will and its ghostly hand would clearly be unnecessary and invalid—or, more precisely, not yet valid. Agency, intention, meaning—will—thus require the textual mediation of a legal document precisely when and because they can no longer manifest themselves in the flesh, in the actively writing, dispensing, or dispossessing hand. The will and testament is a resuscitation of, and compensation for, this lost agency: the phrase "Given under my hand" amounts to a tacit confession that no hand is in fact present *to* give, that only its material trace in the form of a written signature remains—and thus that the living agency posited as prior and superior to the law's dead letter is itself frail, provisional. Erasing the hand it purports to "give," the phrase allows Twain to take away with one hand what he has extended to us with the other.

F. M. Senior's pen-and-ink illustration from chapter 8 of the 1894 edition underscores these ironies. Judge Driscoll, the adoptive father and ostensible uncle of Tom Driscoll, responds to the news that Tom has run up several hundred dollars in gambling debts by "bust[ing]" his will and disinheriting the boy (35). The illustration accompanying the passage depicts a written

document marked "Last Will of Judge Driscoll" being torn to shreds by a pair of white, apparently masculine hands (see figure 6). The relationship between testator and testament would thus appear to be clear: as long as the judge's hands demonstrate agency (as long as the judge is alive), the agency of the legal document remains subordinate and provisional, subject to the authority of an intentionality still located in and on the body. The living hand remains the primary legal and iconographic manifestation of agency, and the disembodied agency of the will seems to pale in comparison to the vigorous embodied agency of the judge.

The illustration also hints, however, that this hierarchical account of the relationship between the living agency of the hand and the legal agency of the will and testament actually rests on a false opposition. The problem with the hands in the drawing is that they aren't attached to a body. Rather, they simply hover against the white space of the page, near the vertical middle of the illustration. The left hand is cut off at the wrist by the left margin of the image; the right protrudes along with its wrist from the white cuff of a shirtsleeve and the dark sleeve of a jacket that extends as far as the lower forearm before terminating abruptly in the right margin. (The Norton Critical Edition contains a cropped version of the illustration that only intensifies this amputation effect.) On reinspection, it becomes difficult to tell whether the hands in the drawing are in fact ripping up the will, whether they too are falling through the air alongside the tattered fragments of the document, perhaps even clutching desperately at them for some sort of purchase against gravity—as if the destruction of the legal objectification of agency brings about the destruction of the legal person more generally—or whether they float freely among the shreds of paper, like the limbs of an etherealized necro citizen or perhaps the disembodied spirit hands of contemporary seances. We might even question the validity of assuming that they belong to the same person, the same putative body, at all. They are, in short, no more grounded than the legal document they supposedly ground or the fictions of legal agency that ostensibly ground them. It is almost enough to unseat a reader's reason.

This abysmal movement is characteristic of virtually every encounter with the human hand in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*: the appeal to the hand as a source of order invariably winds up destabilizing the hand—and the situation—rather than stabilizing either one. Whereas Cushing emphasizes the hand's originary role in precisely those systems of thought that fix meaning and that discriminate between objects in exact and noncontradictory ways—enumeration, orientation, signification—*Pudd'nhead Wilson* suggests that what is "still dormantly existent" in every human hand (Cushing 308) is a fundamental *im*precision and contradictoriness that can only decenter the relationship between the body and identity or meaning. In the remainder of this chapter, I

"Dissen*whiched* him?"

"Dissenhurrit him."

"What's dat? What do it mean?"

"Means he bu'sted de will."

"Bu's—ted de will! He would n't *ever* treat him so! Take it back, you mis'able imitation nigger dat I bore in sorrow en trib-bilation."

Roxy's pet castle—an occasional dollar from Tom's pocket—was tumbling to ruin before her eyes. She could not abide such a disaster as that; she could n't endure the thought of it. Her remark amused Chambers:

"Yah-yah-yah! jes listen to dat! If I 's imitation, what is you? Bofe of us is imitation *white*—dat's what we is—en pow'ful good imitation, too—yah-yah-yah!—we don't 'mount to noth'n as imitation *niggers;* en as for——"

"Shet up yo' foolin', 'fo' I knock you side de head, en tell me 'bout de will. Tell me 't ain't bu'sted—do, honey, en I 'll never forgit you."

"Well, *'tain't*—'ca'se dey's a new one made, en Marse Tom 's all right ag'in. But what is





Figure 6. Judge Driscoll busting his will. Marginal illustration by F. M. Senior. Mark Twain [Samuel L. Clemens], *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson and the Comedy Those Extraordinary Twins* (Hartford: American Publishing, 1900), p. 99. Courtesy *Mark Twain in His Times: An Electronic Archive*.

will trace this demystifying movement through the major manual discourses at work in the novel, starting with fingerprinting, which offers a particularly instructive example of a system whose "scientific" insistence on rational assumptions and procedures renders it especially vulnerable to abysmal effects. *Pudd'nhead Wilson*'s debt to contemporary scholarship on fingerprinting—and especially to Francis Galton's monograph *Finger Prints*, which appeared in the same year as Cushing's article and first subjected the technique of fingerprinting to statistical analysis—has been well documented (see especially Gillman, "Sure Identifiers" 97–100; Rogin).[13] It seems clear that Twain read Galton's book sometime between drafting "Those Extraordinary Twins" late in 1892 and revising the manuscript into *Pudd'nhead Wilson* the following summer, when fingerprinting procedure and lore first come significantly into play in the text.[14] Indeed, many of the central ironies attending fingerprinting in Twain's novel may be traced to a set of telltale evasions, omissions, and rhetorical moves already at work in Galton, shoring up, but also laying bare, the foundations of his carefully reasoned intellectual edifice.

Fingering the Criminal

The plot of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is set in motion by parallel episodes of mistaken identity that date from early 1830. On one hand are the slave Roxana's changelings. Seeking a better future for her light-skinned, flaxen-haired slave child, Valet de Chambre, she switches him in the cradle with the physically identical yet (apparently) genealogically unrelated Tom Driscoll, the white son and heir of her master, Percy Driscoll (13–15). She then takes the lead in acculturating the unknowing boys to their new roles (15–19). Though the novel constantly questions how much legitimacy, "reality," or agency should be assigned to the lost hereditary identities of "Tom" (as Roxana's biological son comes to be known) and "Chambers" (as Driscoll's does), it just as constantly reminds the reader that neither boy is "really" who the people of Dawson's Landing think he is.

Then there is the story of David Wilson. A native of "the interior of the State of New York" and a recent graduate of "an eastern law school," Wilson has come to the "remote region" of frontier Missouri "to seek his fortune" (5) but becomes an instant pariah when, on his first day in Dawson's Landing, he unveils a sophisticated deadpan humor that goes unrecognized among the townsfolk, who seem to lack any capacity for irony. No doubt in part because his joke, about owning half of a disagreeable dog so you can kill your half, threatens to dredge up the violence, fractiousness, and fundamental absurdity of the slaveholding economy of antebellum Missouri, Wilson must be condemned, and safely contained, as a "pudd'nhead," his intelligence, subtlety, and potential for critical engagement with proslavery ideology all

mislabeled as sheer, even "uncanny," stupidity (5–6). As with the changelings, there's more to Wilson than Dawson's Landing will allow itself to see.

In a novel that from its earliest pages seems obsessed with calling people and things by their right names, this climate of mistaken identity persists for twenty-three years, until Wilson turns to fingerprinting at the novel's climax in order to identify (and reenslave) "Tom" as Valet de Chambre, to reinstate (and supposedly emancipate) "the real heir" as Tom Driscoll, and to rehabilitate his own reputation with Dawson's Landing, which at long last drops the "pudd'nhead" from his name in favor of a new title, mayor, that works in tandem with Wilson's biblical given name, David, to signify civic responsibility, communal leadership, and personal heroism.[15] In this way the former Yankee and quasi-abolitionist jokester moves from the margins to the political and ideological heart of antebellum slave society. No pudd'nhead he, but a newly minted, representative white citizen of the slaveholding U.S. South.

That a man who suffers under mistaken assumptions about his character and merit for the better part of his adult life would become interested in a technique for establishing and fixing personal identity seems sound enough psychologizing on the novelist's part, though Twain arguably takes substantial liberties with history in depicting Wilson at work collecting fingerprints from the citizens of Dawson's Landing in 1830, a date that would put him well ahead of all but the earliest of the pioneers in fingerprint research whom Twain would have learned about from Galton's book.[16] For all his ostensible head start on these historical figures, however, Wilson turns out to have much in common with them. The sign that he briefly and fruitlessly hangs in front of his law office, "DAVID WILSON / ATTORNEY AND COUNSELLOR AT LAW. / SURVEYING, CONVEYANCING, ETC." (7), links his career with the résumés of some of the key figures in Galton's brief history of fingerprinting.

One of these men, Gilbert Thompson, was an American geologist who in the early 1880s led a government surveying party into "the wild parts of New Mexico" (Galton 27). As a precaution against forgery, Thompson hit on the idea of affixing his fingerprint alongside his signature on commissary orders for the members of the surveying team. *Finger Prints* contains a reproduction of one of these vouchers, dated August 8, 1882, and made out to a character whose name, "Lying Bob," no doubt pleased and amused Galton (pl. 1; see figure 7). Moenssens claims that Thompson's innovation was "[t]he first legal use of fingerprints in the United States" (*Fingerprint Techniques* 21). As a Yankee surveyor who devises a novel solution to a frontier payroll problem, Thompson directly anticipates Pudd'nhead Wilson's "humble capacities" as both a "land surveyor and expert accountant" in Dawson's Landing (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 7).

Moreover, Wilson's legal background, destined role as public servant, and experience with "conveyancing," the drawing and recording of deeds, leases,

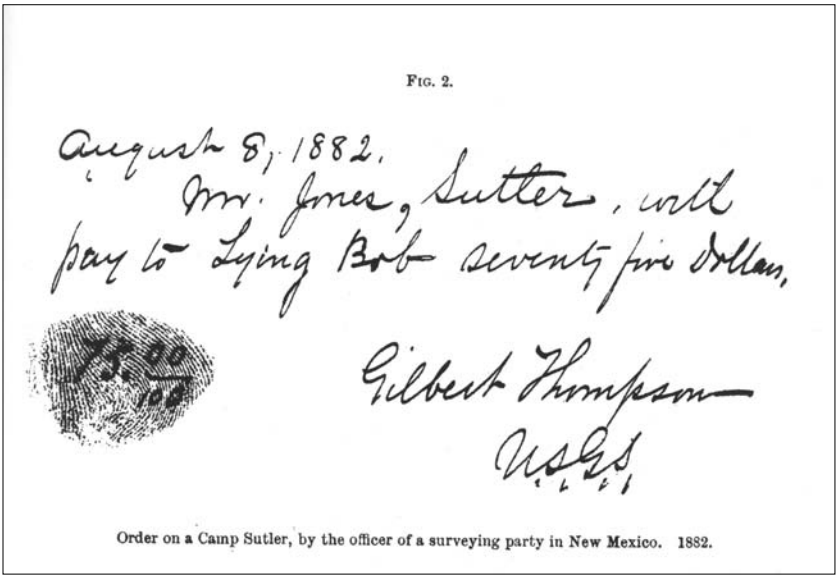

Fig. 2.
August 8, 1882.
Mr. Jones, Sutler, will
pay to Lying Bob seventy five Dollars,
Gilbert Thompson
U.S.G.S.
Order on a Camp Sutler, by the officer of a surveying party in New Mexico. 1882.

Figure 7. Pay voucher for "Lying Bob." Francis Galton, *Finger Prints* (London: Macmillan, 1892), pl. 1.

and titles, all evoke the career of another major figure in *Finger Prints*, Sir William Herschel. Galton's most important source of anecdotal information and primary research materials concerning fingerprints, Herschel, a British subject who served as chief administrator of the Hooghly district of Bengal, India, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, was also apparently the first individual to put fingerprinting to regular and practical use as a system of personal identification. As early as 1858, a time of great anxiety surrounding England's imperial presence in India, Herschel began experimenting with fingerprints as a supplementary form of personal "signature," appended to contracts and deeds involving "natives" whose written signatures proved difficult to authenticate (see Galton 27–28). By the late 1870s, he had "introduced the use of fingerprints" more systematically "in several departments at Hooghly" (28). Every bit the "collector" suggested by his official administrative title, Herschel over a quarter century in Bengal compiled a massive archive of prints, upon which Galton later drew in formulating his elaborate statistical evidence for the reliability of fingerprint data. Indeed, Galton would express his "large indebtedness" to Herschel on several different occasions in *Finger Prints* (4; see also 9, 27).

For Herschel, as for Galton after him, the problem of personal identification was inseparable from problems of empire and was intensified by them. "In India and in many of our Colonies," writes Galton, "the absence of sat-

isfactory means for identifying persons of other races is seriously felt." To the imperial European eye that Galton presents as unproblematically normative, the natives tend to look alike, "and in too many cases they are characterised by a strange amount of litigiousness, wiliness, and unveracity" (149), especially, according to another of Galton's colonial sources, a "Major Ferris, of the Indian Staff Corps," in title disputes over land, where the principals often repudiated their own signatures in hope of gaining an advantage (150).[17] In their official roles as imperial conveyancers, Ferris and Herschel found that fingerprinting helped thwart native fraudulence by offering a presumably immutable and "unerring" physiological autograph in place of the more inconclusive, disavowable, and manipulable written one (Ferris qtd. in Galton 151; see also 28). At the same time, as the exigencies of empire made international travel a more and more commonplace occurrence, "honest persons travel[ing] to distant countries" stood to benefit from the "sure means of identification" fingerprinting offered, particularly in cases of mistaken arrest or forced detainment in times of crisis or war between nations (148–149).[18] Even at home, Galton argued, "in civilised lands and in peaceable times," fingerprint technology could help weed out recidivists (a primary obsession of anthropometry as well), along with deserters, impersonators, "upstart claimant[s]," and other "rogues" (149), those debased elements of society who were increasingly linked, in the discourse of contemporary criminology and in the popular imagination of the era, with the atavistic natives of the colonies.[19] Such associations between the criminal and the "ethnically differentiated other" (K. Rowe 176) would resurface in America in the West narrative, whose indistinguishable felons were, not coincidentally, African Americans. Indeed, the convergence of "[b]lackness and criminality" as the "generally equivalent signs of the dangerous ambiguities . . . that fingerprinting is meant to resolve" (178) is a crucial subtext not only of the West case but also of Twain's novel.

Let us pause for a moment, then, to reflect on Wilson's history in Dawson's Landing. A man of education, professional training, and some social privilege, he has journeyed, not unlike a colonial administrator, from the established spheres of metropolitan power and culture (New York state, an eastern law school) to a provincial hinterland whose natives do not speak his language, as evidenced right away by the disastrous dog joke, and who moreover are given to risky ventures and disputes involving land. As in Herschel's India, the natives are characterized by mendacity: one of them, Tom Driscoll, is an inveterate liar and scoundrel, joined in fraudulence by Chambers and Roxana, all of whom are in effect living a lie, or at least a fiction, set in motion with the changeling plot. Like Herschel and Ferris, Wilson encounters indigenous characters who look alike: in addition to the physiologically identical Tom and Chambers, there is a pair of Italian twins, Counts Luigi

and Angelo Capello, who differ slightly in complexion but are "otherwise . . . exact duplicates" (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 27). Even the local yokels who offer their devastating "verdict" on the dog joke are more or less interchangeable, distinguished by the narrator only as "one," "another," "a third," "No. 4," and so on (5–6). In the incorrigible Tom alone, Wilson confronts an impostor, a recidivist, and a false claimant. Moreover, as Galton would no doubt have predicted, the natives of Dawson's Landing are given to "a strange amount of litigiousness," as witnessed by the novel's busted wills, farcical lawsuits, murder trial, and final controversy over the inventory of the Percy Driscoll estate, a dispute that goes all the way to the governor's office (114–115).

With the appearance of the Italian twins' exotic dagger, the links between Wilson's provincial Missouri and Herschel's colonial India grow even more provocative. As Angelo explains, the weapon came into the brothers' hands as a gift from "a great Indian prince, the Gaikowar of Baroda," after having "been in his family two or three centuries" (52). Hoping to reduce his gambling debts, Tom steals the knife and its jewel-studded sheath but is unable to fence them thanks to Wilson's quick work among the local pawnbrokers. Soon afterward, Tom uses the knife to kill Judge Driscoll during a botched robbery attempt, leaving the bloody weapon at the crime scene (94). Suspicion immediately falls on Luigi and Angelo, the former owners of the knife. It is a scenario straight out of Galton: a pair of European citizens are arrested and jailed in a foreign land for a crime they did not commit, and it will fall to fingerprinting to exonerate them.

Complicating the situation even further is the fact that Tom commits the murder as a person of color, having darkened his face with burnt cork before setting out to rob the judge (93). Critics of the novel have been quick to assimilate this detail to the historical context of antebellum black-white relations in America. Eric Lott, for instance, reads the scene in terms of Twain's lifelong fascination with blackface minstrelsy, focusing on the way "minstrelsy's legacy of blood"—a set of essentialist assumptions about racial identity that is always latent in the ideology and discourse of blackface—works in the murder scene to override "minstrelsy's racial theatrics," a more salutary and subversive sense of racial identity as constructed and performative ("Mr. Clemens" 149). Along somewhat similar lines, Arthur Petit notes that Tom was begotten by the sexual thrust of a white master, Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex, upon a slave woman, making his act of stabbing the judge while in blackface the "symbolic counterthrust" of "a terrible black avenger" unleashing "the repressed anger stored up from generations of sexual liberties taken" by members of the white planter class against slaves (480; see also Sundquist, *To Wake* 265).[20]

Yet I would argue that the languages of race and violence at work in the murder scene engage even broader historical and political contexts than the

strictly intranational ones explored by Lott and Petit. Tom's violence with the knife may well reenact, with a vicious twist, a scene of predation and penetration from the slave past.[21] But it also reenacts, in almost point-by-point fashion, a scene from the knife's own Indian history. As Angelo recounts the story:

> A native servant slipped into our room in the [Gaikowar's] palace in the night, to kill us and steal that knife on account of the fortune encrusted on its sheath, without a doubt. Luigi had it under his pillow; we were in bed together. There was a dim night-light burning. I was asleep, but Luigi was awake, and he thought he detected a vague form nearing the bed. . . . Suddenly that native rose at the bedside and bent over me with his right hand lifted and a dirk in it aimed at my throat, but Luigi grabbed his wrist, pulled him downward and drove his own knife into the man's neck. That is the whole story. (53)

Even the "dim" lighting here anticipates the later crime scene in Judge Driscoll's sitting room, which is illuminated only by "a faint glow" from a lamp left "burning low" (94). Lott reads the parallels between these scenes as establishing, in Luigi's act of "justifiable homicide," a precedent for Tom's violence against a member of the planter elite ("Mr. Clemens" 149). But Tom's act more closely resembles that of the Indian servant, another man of color bent on robbery who lashes out murderously against the white gentleman who comes between him and his prize. Twain's depiction of Wilson's transgressive native antagonist, then, arguably owes as much to the imperial and colonial concerns addressed by Herschel and voiced by Galton as to the racial contours of either antebellum or post-Reconstruction American society.[22]

Set down in this frontier hotbed of prevarication, fraud, indeterminacy, imposture, transgression, violence, and recidivism, where even his own identity cannot remain stable and safe, Wilson meets the challenges of "native" society in Dawson's Landing much as Herschel would. As if in loose emulation of the latter's official role as the district "collector," Wilson gathers the fingerprints of his fellow townsmen and women, reproducing almost exactly the procedure practiced by Herschel and reported by Galton:

> I get the subject to pass the fingers of his right hand through his hair, so as to get a little coating of the natural oil on them, and then press the balls of them on the glass. A fine and delicate print of the lines in the skin results, and is permanent if it doesn't come in contact with something able to rub it off. (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 49)

> One example of the ease of making good, but not permanent impressions, is found, and should be tried, by pressing the bulb of a finger against well-polished glass, or against the highly polished blade of a razor. The finger must be very slightly oiled, as if by passing it through the hair; if it be moist, dry it with a

> handkerchief before the oiling. Then press the bulb of the finger on the glass or razor, as the case may be, and a beautiful impression will be left. (Galton 30)

The vast collection of "records" (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 7) that results amounts to a physiological census of Dawson's Landing, upon which Wilson will draw in differentiating, and ultimately disciplining, the impenetrable, intractable natives.

Evan Carton has noted how consistently Wilson's "occupations" involve him in the weighing of claims, the determination of legitimacy, the establishment of boundaries and borders, or the assignment of, in its broadest sense, title (85). Wilson's mission, in short, is to fix meaning in a fluid, unpredictable environment where the imperious (if not quite imperial) authority, certainty, and self-possession of ordinary (white) individuals like himself can apparently no longer be taken for granted. It might come as a surprise, then, to find palm reading alongside legal services, surveying, accounting, conveyancing, and fingerprinting in a synopsis of Wilson's hobbies and avocations. It is true that palmistry serves Wilson in something of the same way his other occupations do, allowing him to map out, fill in, and generally stabilize the hazy borders of individual identity by reading elements of personal history and "character" from the hand.[23] It is also true that the text establishes Wilson's accuracy as a reader of palms much earlier than his expertise in fingerprinting as a means of personal identification, which is hinted at early on but never really put to the test until the murder trial.

Still, palmistry is hardly an exact science, and thus seems in pointed contrast with Wilson's other activities, all of which emphasize left-brain skills such as empirical precision, quantitative analysis, and inductive reasoning—none more so, perhaps, than the forensic science of fingerprinting. Indeed, as a serious practitioner of both palmistry *and* fingerprinting who seems entirely comfortable with the sometimes incompatible premises that underlie and govern each practice, Wilson is probably unprecedented in the annals of either. A brief foray into the epistemologies of fingerprinting and palm reading, with particular attention to the specific position and function of the body in each, will help show why this is so.

Fingerprint logic is of course based on the principle of physical contiguity. It assigns material causes to material effects, reading and reasoning backward from the latter to the former, from a physical mark found in the world to the human body responsible for making that mark. Like any other physical symptom, the print functions as a sign of its cause, a sign, moreover, traceable to one such cause and no other. Fingerprinting, in other words, assumes an absolutely singular and unchanging relation between the material mark and the material body: fingerprints, it is asserted over and over in the literature of fingerprinting, do not change over time and are never duplicated

from person to person, or from finger to finger, not even in the case of (otherwise) "identical" twins. To have found *a* finger that matches a particular print is thus to have found *the* finger that left it, just as, presumably, no finger whose pattern fails to match that of the print *could* have left it. This represents an important epistemological advance on anthropometry, which, as Carlo Ginzburg has noted, could eliminate suspects but was never able to offer any sound scientific basis for the assumption that two identical sets of measurements referred to the same person (106). Contra Umberto Eco's famous dictum, then, fingerprints seem on first inspection to be signs that *cannot* be used to lie (cf. Eco 7).

When practiced responsibly, fingerprinting is notable for its epistemological modesty. "The only thing that can be learned from a fingerprint," David Fisher explains, "is whether it matches another print" (142). Every fingerprint points unerringly toward a specific hand but can ultimately "say" nothing about that hand beyond the fact that it left the mark, can connect it to no underlying identity, heredity, or "character," to no particular race, gender, class, or even age, as researchers from Galton forward have (sometimes grudgingly) acknowledged.[24] Fingerprints may be used to *identify* a body but cannot, properly speaking, *characterize* it in any further way.[25] They tell no story, assign no name, title, or purpose; as Katherine Rowe puts it, "The moment that they enter into a plot of intentional creation they become suspect" (165). The strict rules of scientific procedure forbid such liberties. Stripped of all ontology, interiority, and depth, the telltale hand of fingerprinting retains only the abbreviated agency of marking, imprinting—an agency, moreover, that can be traced only to the surface of the finger in question and no further. Prints may be easy enough to *read*, but they are far more difficult to *interpret*. The investigator is presented with an arch, loop, or whorl whose configuration is absolutely unique—yet in the strictest sense completely meaningless, other than in documenting physical contact between a finger and an object.

If the logical arc of fingerprinting ends, then, with the material specificity of a unique human hand, this is precisely where the palmist begins. That hand, however, concerns the palmist as a material effect rather than a material cause. Whereas fingerprinting is predicated on the hand's capacity for marking, for leaving its distinctive traces upon the physical surfaces of its world, palmistry emphasizes the hand's peculiar capacity for being marked, for registering the influence of internal and external forces that manifest in other than strictly physical ways. In the creases and folds of the palm and in the overall silhouette and shape of the hand, the chiromancer sees the tangible imprint of "character," "history," and "destiny" in a process, however, that cannot be directly observed, empirically verified, or reduced to formula. Unlike the fingerprint, with its single indisputable source, the palm is conspicuously overdetermined as a field of signification, with the interior workings

of the psyche and the exterior workings of the cosmos mysteriously converging on the surface of the body. Moreover, palmistry typically attributes material effects to the immaterial causes of spirit or "character" or fate. The principle of contiguity at work behind palm reading, then, must be understood in metaphysical terms rather than, as in fingerprinting, strictly physical ones.[26]

As we have seen, the fingerprint investigator may link a print conclusively with a finger but must refrain from further speculation or commentary about either one: prints are idiosyncratic but otherwise meaningless.[27] The hand of palmistry, by contrast, is assumed to be pregnant with meaning—the whole point of a reading, after all, is precisely to extract this meaning. Examining the physical features of the hand, the palmist is far less concerned with their idiosyncrasy than with their *content*, with what they appear to say about the subject's personality, past, or future. It is not vital that this content set the subject apart from every other human being who has ever lived; other people too may enjoy a long life, or possess a choleric temper, or be thrown together unexpectedly with a dark-haired stranger. What matters is not that your character or destiny is unique; what matters is that it is *yours*. This is no doubt one reason that palmistry, unlike fingerprinting, is so heavily invested in interpretation and narrative: where the forensic scientist reasons, crisply and clinically, from the smudge on a bar glass to the right index finger of the accused, the palmist proceeds from the body, the proffered hand, to the epistemologically fuzzier notion of the person who proffers it, a person whose story urgently awaits telling. The palmist is expected to display literary skills that would taint fingerprinting methodology, to weave plot and delineate character and motive. That character may include a racial dimension; unlike fingerprint experts, palmists such as Cheiro do not refrain from correlating specific shapes and features of the hand with specific racial groups, which Cheiro tends to euphemize as "nations" (see 62–64). In the discourse and practice of palmistry, art trumps science and gets the trick.

By deriving material effects from immaterial causes and by indulging in interpretive speculations that range far beyond what can inductively be known about a human hand, palmistry flouts reason. This makes it a powerful and familiar evocation of the abyss of reason over which the eminently rational practice of fingerprinting perpetually hovers. Fingerprint discourse frequently hauls out palmistry as its favorite straw man, the premier example of everything fingerprinting is not and must not be. Johannes Evangelist Purkinje's 1823 dissertation at the University of Breslau, one of the seminal documents in the history of fingerprinting, dismisses chiromancy as a "useless science" (qtd. in Ginzburg 107). And here are the opening sentences of Galton's book: "The palms of the hands and the soles of the feet are covered with two totally distinct classes of marks. The most conspicuous are the creases or folds of the skin which interest the followers of palmistry, but

which are no more significant to others than the creases in old clothes; they show the lines of most frequent flexure, and nothing more" (1). Having thus trivialized palmistry, Galton can zero in on the less conspicuous but more intricate patterns that "form the subject of the present book": "the so-called papillary ridges," which despite their "smallness" "are in some respects the most important of all anthropological data" (1, 2). These ridges, it should be noted, are not limited to the bulbs of the thumb and fingers; as Galton knows, they also appear on the palm in "three particularly well marked systems" (54). Still, Galton confines his study of friction skin patterns to fingerprints exclusively: "They are more instructive to study, more easy to classify, and will alone be discussed in this book" (56). Purkinje did likewise, leaving the study of the palm to chiromancers and their "useless" endeavors.

This deliberate circumscription of the field of study is particularly ironic when we consider that the earliest European investigators of friction skin patterns, including Nehemiah Grew of England, Govard Bidloo of Holland, and Marcello Malpighi of Italy, tended to focus on the "palm area" rather than the fingers, a preference shared by the researchers who carried their work forward into the eighteenth century (Moenssens, *Fingerprint Techniques* 60). Moenssens explains that the shift of disciplinary emphasis "from palm and soleprints to fingerprints" was a late nineteenth-century innovation based in part on the greater opportunities for "systematic classification" afforded by fingerprints and in part on their more frequent occurrence at crime scenes. But a more overt professional bias against the palm may have been at work as well. A whole series of long-standing popular associations, after all, linked the palm with fortune-tellers, gypsies, mountebanks, and other unsavory, undisciplined members of the demimonde. To the educated men at the forefront of nineteenth-century fingerprint research, such associations would have been distasteful at best, disastrous at worst, threatening at once the scientific legitimacy and the social prestige of their work. "In the Victorian period," writes Janet Oppenheim, "science and medicine were seeking to anchor themselves firmly in the physical world, distinctly divorced from all disreputable thought systems whose insubstantial foundations could cast doubt on the weightiness of the scientific endeavor" (223).[28] Small wonder, then, that elite men such as Galton felt an anxious need to distance the emerging science of personal identification as fully as possible from any corrupting whiff of palmistry. If the relocation of friction skin research to the fingertips amounts, at least in part, to a massive disciplinary repression of the irrational, disreputable palm, then chiromancy looks more and more like what fingerprinting must debunk or disavow in order to *be* fingerprinting, to gain credibility as a semiotic founded in rational premises and respectable practices. Against this contemporary background, Wilson's simultaneous interest in both activities becomes all the more unusual.

By the time the plot arrives at the murder trial, however, both the novel and its protagonist seem to have grown weary of the subject of palmistry, which makes its last explicit appearance in chapter 11. It might thus appear that Twain's text is simply mimicking its nineteenth-century context, with fingerprinting gradually eclipsing palmistry as an object of intellectual interest and narrative attention as the text unfolds. But the novel's repression of palmistry is nowhere near so complete. This becomes especially evident at the trial where, as Wilson introduces his courtroom audience to the wonders of fingerprinting, a number of the central tenets and tactics of palmistry sneak (or leak) back into his discourse. The resulting conflation allows Wilson to cloak in an aura of scientific legitimacy inferences and statements that in fact exceed the authority of science.

First, however, he has to create that aura, not only for his nascent system of personal identification but for himself as its sole local practitioner and expert. From the first, Dawson's Landing has struggled to characterize, and to name, Wilson's study of finger marks. Is it simply a hobby, another of the "pet fads" with which he passes the "rich abundance of idle time" that goes with being a pariah (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 7)? Is it, as the superstitious Roxana suspects, some sort of "witch-work" (16) or, as Tom mockingly suggests at one point, an "Awful Mystery" (49)? For the better part of the novel, Wilson remains tight-lipped about the nature or purpose of his interest in finger marks, which he refers to only as "an amusement," having found out the hard way that further detail about his activities and ideas only adds to his local reputation for eccentricity (7). In the courtroom, however, Wilson must take this "amusement" and give it the new name of science—a tall order, given that up to now Dawson's Landing has shown little or no inclination to view fingerprinting as a legitimate scientific endeavor. Indeed, Brook Thomas persuasively suggests that "for the fictional audience in Dawson's Landing," as no doubt for many of Twain's readers, "fingerprinting would have been virtually indistinguishable from palmistry" (779). What, after all, "makes one way of reading a hand a science and another 'rank sorcery'" (778–779, citing Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 50)?

As Thomas recognizes, Wilson faces a double bind: the "legal authority" that would allow him "to challenge prevailing community beliefs" at the trial—including beliefs about *him*—"depend[s] upon the authority of science," but at the same time "the criteria of what constitutes a science seems [*sic*] to depend upon prevailing community beliefs" (779). It is, then, precisely to those popular beliefs about science that Wilson must appeal in making his case for fingerprinting. And what quicker and surer way to make fingerprinting look like science to a lay audience than by staging an experiment, subjecting the working assumptions of fingerprinting to empirical verification under controlled conditions? After a brief background lecture on

what Galton would call the "anthropological" significance of fingerprints, Wilson does just this, directing his listeners' attention to their own hands and enlisting them in the demonstration that the "patterns differ on the different fingers," that "[t]he patterns on the right hand are not the same as those on the left," and that "[t]aken finger for finger, your patterns differ from your neighbor's," even in the case of the Italian twins on trial (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 108). Conflating science and showmanship, Wilson turns the courtroom into an impromptu laboratory and theater, and his audience is spellbound: "even the judge and jury were absorbed in this curious work." By the time he proposes a test of his ability to single out any individual in the room and "unerringly identify him" by means of fingerprints alone (109), the same citizens who only moments before greeted the sight of Wilson's glass fingerprint slides with laughter and derision (108) are only too ready to spring from their seats and plant their own prints alongside those of the accused twins on the courtroom's windowpanes. Wilson also takes pains to ensure that his results are repeatable; he insists on correctly identifying a second random series of prints on the window glass "for, by one chance in a million, a person might happen upon the right marks by pure guesswork, *once*, therefore I wish to be tested twice"(110).

Nor are Wilson's scientific props limited to these impromptu transparencies. He has also entered the courtroom with a number of "pantograph enlargements" that reproduce key individual fingerprint patterns "on sheets of white cardboard" (105). Galton worked with similar enlargements in his book (see figure 8), and for good reason: charts, graphs, tables, diagrams, and other visual aids had already, in the nineteenth-century literary and popular imagination, come to signify scientific and technical expertise.[29] Wilson is no doubt playing to the gallery with his exhibits, seeking once again to bolster—to enlarge, as it were—the legitimacy of his undertaking by meeting his audience's expectations concerning science head-on. But that is not all he is doing. He has also arranged his enlargements "according to a plan in which a progressive order and sequence was a principal feature" (105). These pictures of fingerprints, in other words, are meant to work together to tell a story. This might seem innocuous enough, since courtroom performance is always heavily inflected by storytelling. But this quasi-cinematographic sequence of moving images also hints at an inclination on Wilson's part to poach on the epistemological limits of fingerprinting by edging it toward narrative—a mode of discourse more typical of and suited to palmistry. This inclination will resurface even more damagingly as the trial continues.

All the circumstantial evidence points to Luigi as the killer of Judge Driscoll and to Angelo as his accessory before the fact. Any hope of exonerating the twins thus rests on material evidence, on the possibility of identifying the party responsible for the bloody fingerprints left on the murder

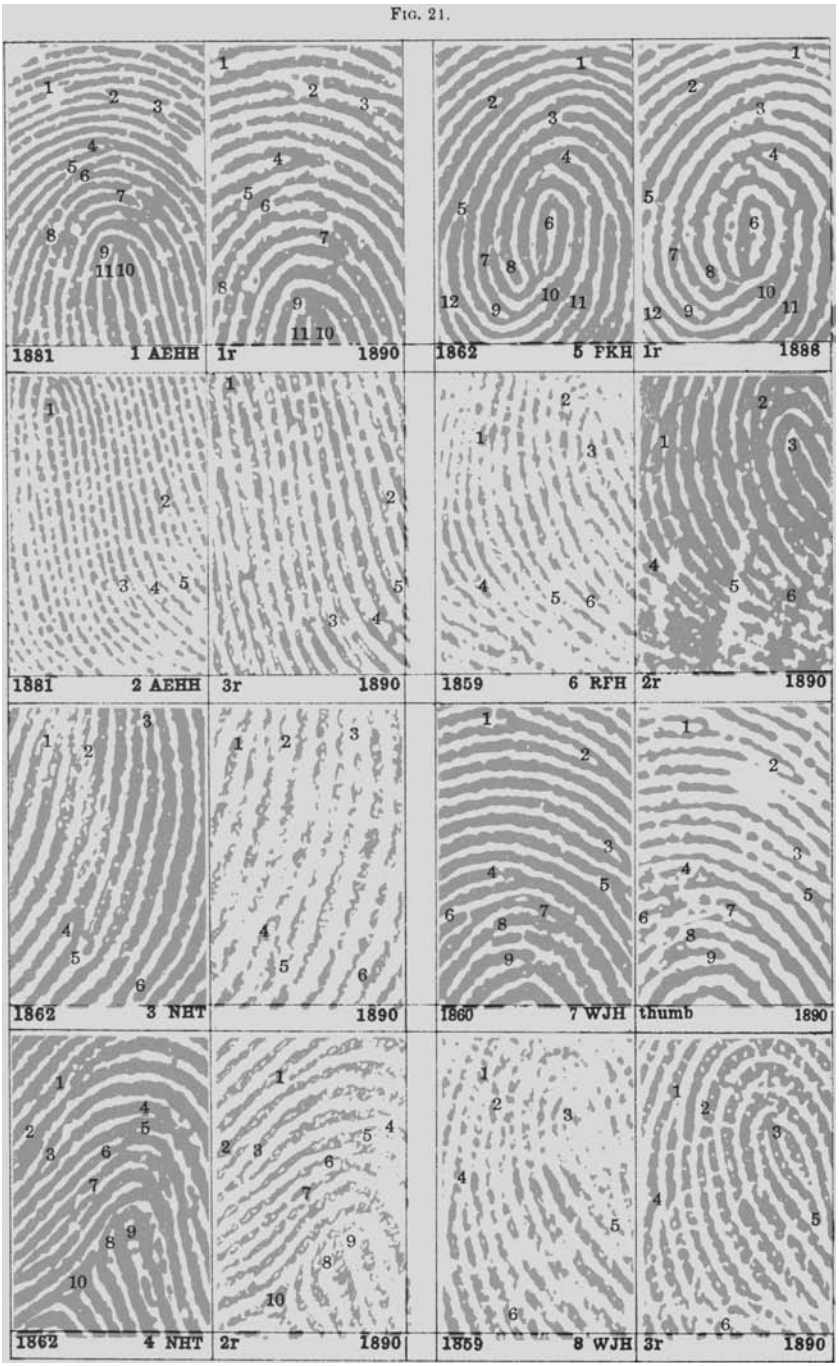


Figure 8. Fingerprint enlargements. Francis Galton, *Finger Prints* (London: Macmillan, 1892), pl. 14.

weapon. From his own inspection of the knife Wilson has determined that neither Luigi nor Angelo is responsible for the prints (97), but, sidetracked by reports of a "mysterious girl" seen leaving the crime scene, he has fruitlessly focused on women and girls in his efforts to identify the assassin (97–98). He is still poring "gloomily" over his glass slides when Tom stops by to gloat over the sinking fortunes of the twins (102). Unaware of the risk he is running, Tom proceeds to handle a number of the slides, including Roxana's, where Wilson fortuitously discovers the print he has been looking for (103).

This discovery, however, is accompanied by another, more problematic one: the "newly (and unconsciously) made" set of prints that implicates Tom in the judge's murder somehow fails to tally with another set recorded in the boy's infancy (104). Before rushing ahead to smooth over this discrepancy with information about the changelings that Wilson does not possess, however, we should pause to appreciate the full extent of the epistemological problem he confronts here. For Wilson, who still knows nothing of the intertwined personal histories of the changelings, the possibility that the fingerprints of an individual have changed over time calls into question the accuracy with which fingerprinting can identify anyone under any circumstances: suddenly, the fact that Tom's prints match the prints on the knife on a particular evening several weeks after the murder can no longer guarantee that they matched at the precise moment the knife struck, can no longer, in other words, place Tom at the crime scene with any reliability. What is more, doubt about the immutability of fingerprints inevitably leads to doubt about their singularity, for once we acknowledge prints to be capable of change, there is nothing to ensure that my prints have not simply transformed to match a set that *you* left somewhere—at a crime scene, perhaps—allowing me to be fingered for something you did but may never be materially linked to, your own prints having changed in their turn. In this through-the-looking-glass scenario, fingerprinting loses any epistemological edge it may have claimed over anthropometry, since it can no longer be used even to eliminate suspects, much less implicate them: the match between Tom's prints and the prints on the knife can no more ensure that Luigi did not kill the judge than it can ensure that Tom did. With the once-stable signifiers of fingerprinting apparently degenerating into flux, all bets are off. The rational foundations of the entire enterprise are shaken. No wonder Wilson's discovery leaves him "stupefied." He knows that he will not be able to link Tom to the murder conclusively without also finding a way to address Baby Tom's anomalous prints and the confounding of reason they introduce.

Remarkably, Galton faced an almost identical crisis in his fingerprint research, and it too involved a child. In chapter 6 of *Finger Prints*, which explores the "persistence" of fingerprint patterns over time (89–99), Galton, once again drawing on William Herschel's print archive, focuses on duplicate

impressions collected over "the intervals from childhood to boyhood, from boyhood to early manhood, from manhood to about the age of 60," and from 67 to 80 years of age (97). All in all fifteen different persons and "between twenty and thirty different digits" were involved (89). Galton combed these sets of duplicate impressions for evidence of the permanence of fingerprint "minutiae," which he defines as breaks in the continuity of individual lines: "forkings, beginnings or ends of ridges, islands, and enclosures" (90). His data supplied him with over 700 individual points of comparison, and in 699 of these cases he found that the minutiae remained unchanged over the interval between impressions (96–97). But there was an exception. The subject, whom Galton identifies only as "the child V. H. H-d" (96), left an initial set of impressions as "a child of 2 1/2 years in 1877," and a later one "in 1890, when a boy of 15" (92–93). Galton locates forty-three points of comparison between the prints from the boy's right ring finger; like Wilson, he reproduces and enlarges the impressions for the benefit of his audience (pl. 13; see figure 9). But there are only forty-two matches. The "point of disagreement" is a "bifurcated ridge in the baby" that has unexpectedly "filled up in the boy" (93). Or as Pudd'nhead Wilson said in this context, "[H]ang it all, the baby's don't tally with the others!" (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 104).

Once again the epistemological implications are clear and potentially devastating: a change in any fingerprint threatens the evidentiary status of every print and thus the "science" of personal identification itself. Even the geological metaphors (ridge, valley, island) routinely invoked throughout the history of fingerprint discourse to lend a reassuring stability to the physiological "landscape" of the hand are affected: when a ridge can simply close up with the passing of a few years, we have entered a thoroughly modern geology of the body, a tectonic rather than static geology, in which the skin's surface, like the planet's, must be understood as susceptible to dynamic, even volatile, transformations. This is the geology also at work in Cottom: where a ridge vanishes, there precisely an abyss remains—and not on the palm, where we might expect such shenanigans, but on the finger itself. As the poster boy for this new dispensation, V. H. H-d confronts Galton's Victorian rationality with the radically discontinuous, decentered, unpredictable nature of the modern body and the modern subjectivity that haunts it. A true generation gap.

The frequency with which Galton alludes to the anomalous prints throughout his chapter hints at anxiety or defensiveness about his uncooperative data, so it is instructive to see how he handles the epistemological and practical challenges it introduces. First, he resorts to some quick methodological footwork: the significance of "disaccord in the details" of fingerprint minutiae, he claims, is often overrated (92). Human error, along with the vagaries of inking and printing, can introduce apparent variations between duplicate

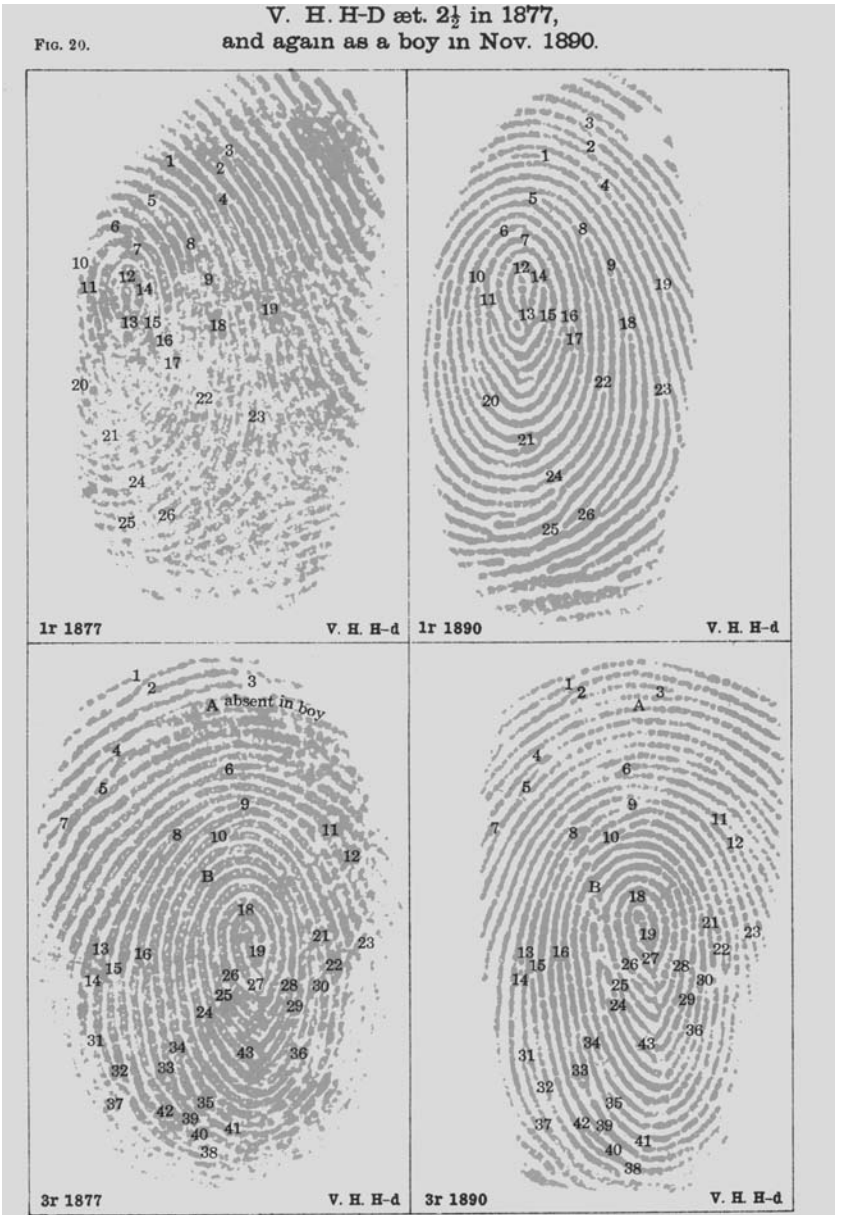


Figure 9. Fingerprints of "V. H. H-d." Francis Galton, *Finger Prints* (London: Macmillan, 1892), pl. 13.

impressions where none actually exist. So too can the disintegration of the ridges that comes with old age. Already, then, we are being prepared for a certain dismissive attitude, a presumption of insignificance where apparent discrepancies between prints are concerned. These explanations, however, offer little insight into the specific case of V. H. H-d, since Galton expresses no technical misgivings about the manner in which the boy's prints were recorded and transmitted, and since the question of advanced age is obviously moot. The anomaly, then, remains. Galton's response is to remind the reader, more than once, that the principle of persistence was corroborated 699 out of 700 times. The sole exception only proves the general rule.

Galton refines this argument in his next chapter, "Evidential Value," by means of detailed statistical calculations that go on for many pages. Basing his figures on the number of minutiae observable in a typical print, he claims that even when two fingerprints exhibit a point of disagreement, the odds against their belonging to different persons are still more than 2^{41} to 1 (112). In other words, a single discrepancy between two otherwise identical impressions should not prevent them from being attributed to the same person. This leads Galton to conclude resoundingly that even an inexact or "*nearly* complete accordance between two prints of a single finger . . . affords evidence requiring no corroboration, that the persons from whom they were made are the same" (112–113; emphasis added). Galton may have exchanged absolute scientific certainty for overwhelming statistical probability, but here, by a rhetorical elision not unknown to statisticians, he turns probability into its own kind of practical certainty. The physical signs simply speak for themselves. And what is more, "this evidence is applicable not only to adults, but can establish the identity of the same person at any stage of his life between babyhood and old age, and for some time after his death" (113). The cautionary counterexample of V. H. H-d has already been discarded, reduced to statistical insignificance, in an act of methodological repression that allows Galton to rescue for fingerprinting the consistency that is the hallmark of reason. Once again we see the disavowal of anomaly that is so crucial to the establishment of any new science, the founding misrecognition that allows it to *be* scientific. However narrowly, the abyss has been skirted.

Wilson battles anomaly not with statistics but with narrative; where Galton juggles numbers, he tells a story. A story, however, not of one boy but of two. He stumbles upon this story fully as fortuitously as he comes across Tom's incriminating print on Roxana's slide. For Wilson, the discrepancy in Tom's print records could simply point to the scientist's own error in naming and dating his slides; the incongruous print might really belong to someone other than Tom. But Wilson insists on his procedural rigor: "I'll swear the names and dates are right. . . . I never labeled one of these things carelessly in my life" (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 104). Nor does he even entertain the

possibility that fingerprinting is simply illegitimate as an identification technique, premised on faulty assumptions about print persistence or singularity. Some third, as yet unformulated, explanation must be in order, and it comes to Wilson from, of all places, a dream (104).[30] Upon awakening and digging back into his fingerprint collection, he discovers an anomaly in Chambers's prints that directly complements the one in Tom's: the prints of Baby Chambers match those of the mature Tom and vice versa. Either prints can simply migrate from body to body—and in a suspiciously reciprocal manner—or the two infants were exchanged. Wilson chooses the explanation that will not unseat his reason.

The changeling plot, however, brings its own difficulties. Until his breakthrough, Wilson has used the term "confederate" to refer to the owner of the bloody fingerprints found on the murder weapon. The word, which appears six times in less than two pages and nowhere else in the novel, "was the term he had long ago privately accepted for that person—not as being unquestionably the right term, but as being at least possibly the right one" (99). The unsuspected intimacies that Wilson uncovers between the changelings, however, suggest that in the topsy-turvy slave society of Dawson's Landing, individual identity is itself "confederated," a strange, overdetermined yet undifferentiated mishmash of motivations, intentions, and agencies all coexisting and perhaps even competing within a single body. This model of confederated identity is already present, of course, in the "person" of the conjoined Cappellos of "Those Extraordinary Twins," who struggle for control of their joint pair of legs and undergo numerous comic disjunctions of intention and embodiment (when Luigi drinks, it is Angelo, a teetotaler, who gets drunk [143]; when Angelo gets sick, it is Luigi who must take the medicine [160]). Twain may have separated these twins in the published novel, but their uncanny hybridity persists in the conflicted agency of each of the changelings. Indeed, the changelings, and not Wilson, may be the novel's truest pudd'nheads, so thoroughly mixed up are their respective identities. Predictably, their situation creates naming problems that prove especially troublesome in the title-haunted world of Dawson's Landing. In one of the young men, for instance, the hereditary endowment of Valet de Chambre, including mixed racial ancestry, exists alongside decades of socialization as the white, privileged Tom Driscoll. Fingerprinting has helped Wilson single out this changeling as the judge's murderer, but it cannot help him to interpret—name—the culprit. To call him "Tom" would implicate his social identity in his crime; to call him "Chambers" would implicate biology and birth. "Tom" implicitly links deviance with whiteness, "Chambers" with a mixed racial ancestry that the local one-drop "fiction[s] of law and custom" (9) code as black. Neither name, then, can be sufficient to identify the killer when agency is so hopelessly composite and blurred.

To his credit, Wilson at first proceeds carefully. As he reconstructs the stories of the murder and the changelings for his courtroom audience, he refers to the children as "*A*" and "*B*" (110–112). Once again, the terminology is straight out of Galton, who has himself cribbed it from his correspondent, Major Ferris.[31] The strategy allows Wilson to establish, through a long chain of inference, both *A*'s guilt and his turbulent personal history without having to commit to a name for him or his counterpart. Thus, it builds suspense while reserving judgment about identity.

Wilson's terms, however, are not entirely free of epistemological baggage. In the field of mathematics from which they are drawn, *A* and *B* conventionally designate values that are unknown but constant, as in the linear equation $Ax + By = C$, where they do not vary relative to other values. This already makes them somewhat dubious as labels for the changelings, whose own identities or "values," as Wilson well knows, have been anything but constant. It might have been more accurate to use x and y, the mathematical terms for unknown variables, to designate the fluid, shifting identities of the two boys. After all, if identity is understood to be a constant value, that means constant from the beginning, from birth. Wilson thus refers to fingerprints as "natal autographs": his fantasy of an unchanging identity, abetted by his mathematical terminology, combines with fingerprinting's fantasy of an unshifting physiological signifier to privilege heredity as the dominant factor at work in personality and behavior. This makes it possible for Wilson to conclude that while *B* "*became* a negro and slave" (112; emphasis added), *A* simply *is* one, by birth, and thus always was and has never stopped being one. By contrast, *B* was never "really" a Negro or a slave, his twenty-three years' experience notwithstanding; all along, he was and is the white boy he was born to be. The machinations of the changeling plot are irrelevant, superficial; the true and lasting identity is the "natal" one, making Wilson's stance and vocabulary of cautious neutrality unnecessary. At last, then, the killer can be named, assigned the title that corresponds to his natal identity. *A* becomes "Valet de Chambre, negro and slave—falsely called Thomas à Beckett Driscoll," as Wilson commands him to "make upon the window the finger-prints that will hang you!"(112). With these devastating words, a laboriously evolved, deeply problematic social identity, together with the highbrow name that served for so long as its social abbreviation, is dismissed out of hand as false, a mere charade. Wilson has taken a nuanced, plural personality and smoothed it out into a satisfyingly monolithic and stable one.

Palming It Off on Race

It doesn't hurt, of course, that Wilson's trump card is also a race card. The effect of his performance is to take two intrinsically jumbled identities and to

unjumble them by sheer rhetorical force, doling out blackness and whiteness, along with guilt and innocence, to separate bodies. By fingering the "negro and slave" for the judge's murder, he manages at once to biologize identity, racialize deviance, pathologize blackness, and play to the racial anxieties of a white community traumatized by the death of one of its leading citizens. By the time Wilson is finished in the courtroom, identity is no longer confederated; it is quite literally *segregated*, its logic channeled from the confusion of both-and into the reassuring clarity of either-or as it is distributed into and onto opposable bodies.

This segregation takes another form as well. As long as the white, well-born Cappello twins were the principal suspects in the murder, Wilson left no stone unturned in his search for a "confederate" in the crime. He was eager to extend responsibility beyond the borders of a few select individuals, and the mysterious prints left at the crime scene came to symbolize, in their own way, this sense of extended or shared agency. Once the prints have led Wilson to a "negro and slave," however, this obsession with manu-facturing complicity and confederation all but evaporates.[32] True, Wilson is willing to assign a degree of culpability to another Negro and (former) slave, Roxana. Perhaps recalling that *A* has left the print that exposes him on *her* slide—a suggestive image that hints at a species of composite or at least complicit agency—Wilson reserves a small role for her in his narrative of guilt, unjustly accusing her of "selfish" purposes in the long-ago exchange of the infants.[33] He makes no effort, by contrast, to link the judge's downfall to the white planters themselves, the slaveholding "Confederates" (I capitalize the word to underscore Twain's marvelous pun) whose arrogance first sired *A* and then so disastrously spoiled him. With the perfect racial scapegoat in hand, Wilson would have to be a fool or an idealist to implicate other, more equivocal figures in the crime. So a formerly wide net of blame tightens into a straitjacket around *A*, thanks in no small part to the logic of fingerprinting, which, with its rigorous insistence on the one-to-one correspondence between print and body, works to isolate agency and thus to "conceal human interdependency" (Carton, "*Pudd'nhead Wilson*" 92). Wilson's unwillingness to confront the complicity of the white community in the judge's death, his insistence on, in effect, segregating guilt (and moreover segregating it racially), thus amounts to a repetition of the same sin he once ridiculed with his dog joke: the inability or unwillingness to recognize the deep-seated, vital forces that subtly and reciprocally link the members of a common body in a web of responsibility and collusion.[34]

Wilson has extracted a stunning amount of information from the surface of a human hand, all of it presented under the duly scientific sign and sanction of fingerprinting. A number of his most provocative claims, however, clearly range beyond the epistemological limits of fingerprinting. It

is one thing, after all, to posit *A* as the source of the bloody prints on the Indian knife, but it is surely another to make allegations about his heredity, racial identity, and moral character ("a usurper" and "assassin"; Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 112), to recount the story of his infancy and early childhood, or to venture predictions about his future ("make upon the window the fingerprints *that will hang you*!" [emphasis added]), all ostensibly on the basis of fingerprint evidence.[35] Such revelations about character, history, destiny, and especially race sound more like the work of a palm reader than the conclusions of a scientific expert. Earlier in the novel, *A* (one can no longer quite call him Tom) remarked that Wilson "used to tell people's fortunes, too, when [he] took their finger-marks" (49). Here, though without admitting it, Wilson reads prints as if they were palms, offering storytelling and interpretation in place of rational analysis, all the while claiming the rhetorical authority of a scientist rather than a showman.[36] Conflating fingerprinting and palmistry, "science" and "art," material and circumstantial evidence in an outrageous mystification, his courtroom discourse is ultimately as muddled and confederated as the identities that he uses it to disclose and dismember.[37]

It is especially ironic that Wilson poaches on the palmist's art in order to fix the elusive personalities of *A* and *B*, for palmists routinely acknowledge the protean nature of the body and identity. Twain's contemporary Cheiro, for instance, observes that the lines of the palm "may appear, diminish, or fade, which must always be borne in mind when reading the hand" (68). This is a far cry from Galton's stubborn insistence on the permanence of fingerprint patterns. For Galton, print persistence was the necessary guarantor of an unwavering identity. A mutable palm, by contrast, would seem to imply a mutable identity, which may help explain why palm readers have so many repeat customers hungry for some evidence that their luck has changed, that they have reformed their character or altered their destiny since their last visit. Once he "reads" an immutable racial identity from *A*'s hand, however, Wilson has in effect turned palmistry against itself, an error he compounds by using this same "reading" to fix and isolate blame for the judge's death. Palmistry approaches human events as the complex products of interior and exterior forces; for the palmist, every act is situated at the interstices of character and fate. Few palmists, then, would be fazed by an account of human agency as plural, layered, shared, or overdetermined. But Wilson's reading evades any awareness of shared agency by confining all blame for the crime to *A* alone, and moreover to *A*'s racial "character" alone, to the workings of a strictly inherent pathology that Wilson is only too willing to essentialize. In this too he puts palmistry at cross-purposes with its own premises.

Perhaps the crowning irony is that, were Wilson better versed in the traditions of palmistry, he might have been led to very different (not to say more accurate) conclusions about *A*'s identity and name. Having finally matched

the bloody fingerprints with his records, Wilson would be well aware of what the reader already knows from Twain's elaborate staging of the murder scene: the fatal blow and the telltale natal autograph are both the work of *A*'s *right* hand. This detail would not be lost on an experienced palm reader, since palmistry assigns dramatically different functions and interpretive content to the two hands. As Cheiro explains, "There is a well-known old saying on this point: 'The left is the hand we are born with; the right is the hand we make.' . . . [T]he left hand indicat[es] the natural character, and the right show[s] the training, experience, and the surroundings brought to bear on the life of the subject" (74). Palmists and students of palmistry are in general agreement on this point: the left hand reveals the influence of heredity, the right hand the influence of environment.[38] Even as it recognizes the joint work of these functions in constituting identity, palmistry in effect segregates them, mapping them onto a body divided against itself: birth on one hand, training on the other.

According to Wilson, however, *A*'s right hand is the hand of a Negro and slave—the hand he was born with, not the hand "made" (or perhaps unmade) by years of white spoiling and petting. It is the hand of Valet de Chambre, not Tom Driscoll. Wilson, then, arguably gets his terms exactly backward. Palmist lore would suggest that *A*'s right hand reveals his social conditioning, performing the work of the debased white man he has been trained (not born) to be. The novel echoes this conclusion, repeatedly suggesting from its early chapters that nurture rather than nature is the key to *A*'s corruption; significantly, even after Wilson's courtroom race-baiting, the narrator continues to call the young man Tom (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 112, 114, 115). Wilson's reading, however, stubbornly conflates character with heredity, heredity with guilt, and all three with blackness. This is the only way he can spare himself and his community a messy confrontation with the white roots of its violence, the only way he can exonerate "Tom Driscoll" for *A*'s crime: by bending the rules that map character and agency onto the hands.

His final act of reading the body in the courtroom is no less troubling. Confronted by Wilson's dramatic allegations, *A* faints dead away onto the courtroom floor, which Wilson immediately interprets as a confession (113). By this he no doubt means to suggest a racial confession as well as a legal one, since in his eyes *A* is as guilty of being black as he is of being a murderer—as guilty, in other words, of passing as a white man as of killing one. A reader alert to the "ashen face" (112) and "white lips" (113) that *A* turns toward his accuser before collapsing, however, might see a very different kind of racial revelation at work here, a "confession" of the extent to which whiteness and not blackness, environment and not heredity—"Tom" and not "Chambers"—is responsible for the judge's death.

Or perhaps *A*'s "confession" signals something else entirely. Earlier in the novel, Roxana has blanched and faltered in much the same way on being *falsely* accused of stealing from Percy Driscoll, "reel[ing] in her tracks" as "the color vanishe[s] out of her face" (12). Her pallor and weak knees signal her innocence rather than her guilt. But they also confess to fear, the fear of a Negro and slave before the arbitrary and virtually limitless power of her white master. Wilson ultimately wields an equally dizzying authority over the man he pronounces a Negro and slave, the power to dictate not just his fate but his very identity.[39] The epitome of Percy Driscoll's power over Roxana was his ability and willingness to sell her down the river, and this, of course, is precisely the doom that awaits *A* once Wilson, the legal system, and Driscoll's creditors are through with him (115). At the moment he swoons before the God-like knowledge of Wilson, the narrative emphasizes *A*'s powerlessness alongside his whiteness: he is "impotent," "limp," "lifeless" (113), "the life seemed oozing out of him" (112). He is already in effect turning—or more precisely turning *back*—into property. His "confession" thus points to his victimization and commodification at the hands of the white authority, Wilson. The relationship between the two characters is explicitly chiasmatic, even parasitic: to a very real degree, Wilson creates his new life, identity, and authority as a citizen of Dawson's Landing out of the life, identity, and authority that he drains from *A*: "a made man for good" (114). What the young lawyer is "made" out of is, rather literally, that abject figure on the courtroom floor, much as in Jean Toomer's "Portrait in Georgia," where the African American male body serves as the material ground for the making of southern white womanhood, another subject position whose ethereality recalls that of Castronovo's necro citizen. Indeed, Toomer's and Twain's case studies in the making of white male and female identities in the U.S. South suggest that these forms of national personhood are not only necrotic but vampiric—not only, as Castronovo puts it, "lifeless and disembodied" (74–75) but actively, eerily *undead*, animated largely if not solely by the life they appropriate from the exploited bodies of national others.

In a single rhetorical stroke, then, Wilson restores himself to community and severs his foil from community once and for all; his reentry into civic life demands *A*'s civic death. A reminder or perhaps a fulfillment of his plan to divide and conquer that infernal dog, Wilson's rationalizing words prove as violent and wounding as the Indian knife that drains the life from Judge Driscoll.[40] And his legerdemain with fingerprinting and palmistry allows him to mystify this violence and project it back onto *A*, and in particular onto *A*'s blackness, unmasking, unmanning, and ultimately unmaking the boy in what could be thought of as the antebellum precursor of a high-tech lynching.[41]

Haunted Hands

Throughout the period linking *Pudd'nhead Wilson*'s 1853 setting with its 1894 publication, questions of identity and agency converged on the hand in the debate over a popular movement that gained much more contemporary recognition (and notoriety) than either fingerprinting or palm reading. By turns alternative religion, alternative science, and alternative medicine—and sometimes all three at once—spiritualism, which first arose in the same New York interior that produced David Wilson, was dismissed as quackery by hardheaded positivists. But its insistent questioning of the boundaries between living and dead, self and other, reality and representation, materiality and immateriality, along with its suggestion, to a rapidly modernizing culture increasingly turning to reason as its ruling deity, that reason had been "oversold" (Cottom 15), won it a broad and socially diverse following in Twain's America and Galton's England and made it a forerunner of such twentieth-century critiques of modernity and rationality as surrealism.[42] Moreover, as Cottom and others have argued, spiritualism challenged the authority of the increasingly specialized activity of science to confine legitimate acts of knowing to a professional elite comfortably ensconced in laboratories and other disciplinary enclaves far from the public eye. "Test seances" and other spiritualist "experiments" brought empirical inquiry, observation, and verification out of these remote, sterile spaces and into the familiar, democratic ambience of home, parlor, or lecture hall where, in place of the scientist's arsenal of high-tech equipment, they often revolved around quite ordinary objects: bells, pencils, chairs, and, as Cottom demonstrates with particular brilliance, tables.[43]

Always, however, the principal bone of contention at spiritualist events was agency. Take for example the defining spiritualist institution, the seance. Every seance, or at least every eventful one, is a kind of whodunnit. Effects are produced, things are done or glimpsed or heard or even felt, but the overriding question remains: Who or what is responsible for them? The spirits, whether by independent action or "materialization" through a medium? The medium, whether by conscious fraud or unconscious action? The witting or unwitting agency of other, perhaps suggestible, participants? Seance events confront their witnesses with the disturbing possibility of alien or excess or immaterial agency, subjectivity out of place, impossible to pin down in any directly observable, verifiable material source. As such they represent a major affront to a rational regime dedicated to anchoring agency and other observable phenomena in discrete, differentiable human bodies.

Cottom evokes the bizarre power of this affront in an extraordinary analysis of the spiritualist phenomenon of table tipping (22–48). "Soon after modern spiritualism announced itself with the 'Rochester knockings' of

1848," he writes, "tables took on a new and controversial life. No longer were they content to live out their days impassively upholding dishes and glasses and silverware, vases, papers and novels, bibelots, elbows, or weary heads. They were changed; they began to move" (22). At seances across the United States and, later, across the Atlantic, tables rocked, turned, slid, shook, rose, and reverberated with spirit rappings, bearing witness not only to the presence but to the agency of the dead. By adopting tables "as an organ of speech," the spirits subjected them to a powerful defamiliarization that liberated tables from their long, unremarkable life as images of the quotidian solidity of the real, but also burdened them "with a responsibility," a weight of moral and philosophical meaning that "no one had ever before dreamed they might have" (23). "Customarily viewed as objects of economics, aesthetics, utility, diversion, tradition, or even theology (in the case of church artifacts), the tables of this age demanded a different kind of attention. . . . Emerging at last from their submission in ordinariness, which for so long had seemed to make them exemplary philosophical objects," they suddenly "began to display, as in a tableau, the mystery of things[,] . . . rebelling against their enslavement to particular domestic, economic, and symbolic functions" (23, 42). The tables of spiritualism danced over an abyss of reason. Their antics attested to a powerful agency at work—but what agency, or whose?

What was true of tables in spiritualist circles was perhaps even more true of the human hand, which was emerging at about this time as an exemplary *economic* object in the writings of Marx, Engels, and others. Hands frequently did extraordinary things at spiritualist events, and they receive an obsessive amount of scrutiny in both contemporary and scholarly accounts of spiritualist phenomena. Seance goers might feel the touch of disembodied or invisible spirit hands; some spirits liked to play rough, pinching, prodding, or even slapping observers. Sitters might touch, hold, or even shake the hand of a spirit that had materialized in the body of the medium.[44] In the surrounding darkness they might hear the sound of hands clapping (T. Hall 156), plucking guitar strings (Slater Brown 179; Kerr 68), ringing bells, or rapping on walls, tables, and chairs. They might see phantom hands glowing luminously or writing messages on paper or slate, or, in more conventional exercises in automatic writing, they might receive messages from the medium's own spirit-guided hand, perhaps with the assistance of a planchette, "a small hand rest fitted with wheels and a pencil so as to produce spirit-writing under the touch of a magnetic hand" (Kerr 109).[45] The medium's hands might even change shape at the instigation of the spirits, measurably elongating or contracting, as in the case of noted spiritualist Daniel Dunglas Home (H. Jackson 185). Like Cottom's tables, then, the hands of spiritualism became organs of the uncanny, sites and sources of unexpected mystery

and controversy, of a residual, recalcitrant irrationality. They were haunted hands, subject to an agency seemingly above, beneath, or beyond conscious human intent, taking on a strange, unexpected new life in mid-century America and Europe.

Mark Twain's general interest in occult phenomena is well known among Twain scholars, and his numerous encounters with spiritualism are the subject of an informative book chapter by Howard Kerr (155–189).[46] Rarely if ever, though, does *Pudd'nhead Wilson* figure in discussions of spiritualism's impact on Twain. Yet the novel abounds in quasi-spiritualist phenomena, most notably a persistent sense of subjectivity and agency out of place. Katherine Rowe's observation, for instance, that the novel's opening dog joke suggests "we inhabit a body we do not own and that we cannot predictably control" (188) is in keeping with spiritualism's emphasis on displaced or uncanny agency. Moreover, from the moment Wilson arrives on the scene to be hounded by the barking of that "invisible" dog (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 5), Dawson's Landing is haunted by elusive, vestigial, shadowy, uncanny, unseen, or otherwise "imponderable" presences.[47] Roxana and her fellow slave Jasper are introduced to the reader as invisible voices, floating through the air beneath Wilson's open window (8). The community is visited by mysterious figures who appear out of nowhere and then seem to vanish without a trace: the young woman so brazenly out of place in Tom Driscoll's room, "where properly no young woman belonged" (32); the phantom thief who raids the houses of the local natives (64); the "stoop-shouldered old woman . . . dressed in mourning" seen entering and leaving some of those same houses (65); the "missing confederate" involved in the judge's death (99). (*A*, of course, is the figure behind all of these seemingly spectral visitations.) The Italian twins report the theft of a valuable dagger that no one in Dawson's Landing admits ever to have seen (77). The village even has its own haunted house, "a two-story log house" built by long-departed pioneers, which now stands "crazy and ruinous . . . from long neglect" on the extreme western edge of town (40).

And then there is the murder. If a seance may be said to resemble a whodunnit, then the circumstances surrounding the judge's death suggest that the analogy can run in the other direction as well. Think of it this way: a hand has appeared in a darkened room, asserted its presence and materiality by striking a witness with surprising force, and then vanished as if into thin air, having thoroughly upset the seemingly rational order of events and things. It then becomes a matter of the utmost urgency to determine *whose* hand this was: Luigi's? Angelo's? the mysterious young woman's? some other confederate's? By tracing the physical imprint of the phantom hand to *A*, Wilson can rule out these particular suspects, but he is still far from solving the larger mystery. For as Wilson intuitively realizes, *A* is not so much the

agent of the judge's death as a *medium* for other, multiple agencies, any or many of which may have used his body to strike, or strike back, at a representative of the slaveholding elite.[48] Indeed, it would not be inappropriate to think of *A*'s hand as haunted, as itself a site of alien or surplus or competing agencies, a vehicle for subjectivity out of place. As such, that hand is not so unlike the multiply inscribed dagger it wields, whose blade is engraved with "the ciphers or names of its long line of possessors," the agents—most long dead—who have owned and used it (52).[49] We can see, then, why it becomes so important to name *A*, to decide which spectral agency took possession of his hand in the judge's sitting room. Was that hand a medium for Tom Driscoll's arrogance and greed? for Valet de Chambre's rage? for Roxana's vengeance against her sexual exploitation? for black agency? white agency? for a hereditary identity or a socially constructed one? for some combination or conflation of the above? What guiding intelligence(s), what "spirit(s)," materialized in that murdering hand? Who killed Judge Driscoll?

We already know how Wilson answers this question. So what interests me here is how closely his tactics in the courtroom resemble the tactics of the professional scientists who investigated spiritualist phenomena in the late nineteenth century under the auspices of the Society for Psychical Research or similar organizations and often at the request of spiritualists themselves. Called in to observe situations in which material effects bore no clear relationship to material causes, in which agency seemed either to have shaken loose from its foundation in living bodies or to have deliriously proliferated there, in which any ordinary thing might suddenly take on a mind and a life of its own, such scientists typically responded by seizing control of the conditions under which spiritualist phenomena were produced. As reason threatened to dissolve around them, they sought to regain their peculiar monopoly over meaning, to channel it back into the orderly, noncontradictory, positivistic forms they preferred. So they spirited mediums away to laboratories where they could be observed under the austere conditions of science, or they imposed a laboratory-like rigor upon seances conducted elsewhere. Everywhere they sought the covert or illicit material cause that could account for the peculiar effects of spiritualism while leaving their own scientific assumptions intact.[50]

And always, always, they directed attention and suspicion toward the hands. If the phenomena of spiritualism are not genuine, after all, mediumship pretty much boils down to prestidigitation. So it was essential to keep a close eye on the medium's hands and to prevent them, if necessary, from being where and doing what they shouldn't. To this end, mediums were often subjected to humiliating treatment at the hands of psychic researchers. Their hands were locked in stocks (Pearsall 44), placed in cages, or bound by ropes, straps, chains, straitjackets, or even more elaborate contraptions that one his-

torian has compared to S/M gear (Owen 231; see also Slater Brown 188–190; T. Hall 154–156; Inglis 241, 268, 284; Pearsall 36).[51] They were hooked up to galvanometers and other electrical devices designed to detect mediums "out of place" in the darkened seance room (Pearsall 231). Hands were plunged into bowls of water, as part of an ingenious device that measured the medium's ability to exert "kinetic" pressure upon a surface or object by means other than direct muscular force (Slater Brown 159–160; Inglis 221). They were dipped in dye by researchers on the lookout for spirit hands that might bear similar stains (Inglis 275; Stein 35). They were routinely held by other sitters and occasionally even seized by skeptical "spirit-grabbers" eager to trace the hand of an otherworldly visitant to the arm of an all too worldly medium or accomplice (Owen 69). In spiritualism, scientists and skeptics alike seemed to agree, the medium *was* the message. Control that medium, and you controlled meaning. And the surest way to control a medium was by fixing, binding, pinioning, grabbing, marking, measuring, or otherwise monitoring the hands.

One noted medium who willingly submitted to such restrictions and was still able to produce a variety of sensational effects was an Italian woman named Eusapia Palladino.[52] Palladino performed seances in lit as well as darkened rooms and permitted investigators to hold down her hands and even her feet throughout the proceedings. Under carefully controlled conditions, she was still able to move and even levitate furniture, to produce rapping sounds, to imprint the mark of a hand or face on a distant layer of clay, and to generate "pseudopods," or phantom limbs, out of her own body. Of the many examples of late nineteenth-century mediumship under scientific duress, I cite the case of Palladino because of the international attention generated by the seances she gave in Italy in 1892 and 1893 (Brandon 130; Pearsall 222). At precisely this time, of course, Twain was living in Florence, writing and revising *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. There is, then, a strong possibility that the Palladino case offered Twain a vivid and nearby example both of the uncanny power of spiritualist manifestations and of the lengths to which scientific investigators were willing to go in order to bring such manifestations under their disciplinary authority and control.

Wilson's courtroom becomes the site of just such a showdown between reason and occult meaning. Like an experienced psychic researcher, Wilson uses every scientific means at his disposal to take control over the haunted hand of *A*, and to impose meaning upon that hand, a meaning that he and his fellow citizens can live with. And this of course means a single, stable meaning rather than a plural or indeterminate one. So Wilson takes an uncanny display of mediumship and rewrites it as an all too canny race murder, exercising his scientistic authority in order to exorcise the multiple, invisible agencies affiliated with *A*'s hand, leaving the one identity that Daw-

son's Landing is willing to see there. Then, having conceptually immobilized the body, Wilson presides over its physical immobilization: as he concludes his sensational revelations and the courtroom clock strikes noon, the "new prisoner" is led away in handcuffs and jailed (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 113). The image at once symbolizes and completes the semantic "arrest" of *A*'s enormous polyvalency, the legal appropriation and discipline of his body, identity, agency, and meaning through the immobilization of his hands. He's a "new prisoner"—a new man, if ever there was one—but his own man he can be no more.

The irony grows even more bitter in the novel's brief conclusion, where *A* is sold down the river to appease the creditors of the Percy Driscoll estate (114–115).[53] We learn that what has been arrested can also be frozen, and then liquidated, as an asset; the objectifications of the legal system work hand in hand with the economics of slavery. Even here *A*'s hand remains haunted, but what haunts it now is not so much multiple agency as the presence of any agency at all. To the creditors, that hand represents valuable property, but insofar as it has also *acted* it raises the crucial issues of subjectivity and responsibility. To punish *A* for that act, to imprison him for life, means destroying his value as a slave; to make good on that value means commuting the legal sentence and thus abrogating the moral equation between crime and punishment. Which kind of accountability, then, is it to be for the slaveholding society—moral or fiscal? The state of Missouri makes the choice that will not unseat its ledgers. That choice, however, cannot entirely eliminate the residue of agency that lingers uncannily about *A*'s commodified hand and person. Human property haunted by human agency, as channeled through the resistant materiality of the body: the metaphysical riddle of the slave confronts slaveholding society with its central moral dilemma, a dilemma that in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* finds its truest, most arresting incarnation in the human hand.[54]

Mano a Mano

The anachronistic setting and story line of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* allow Twain to explore, and in the end to satirize and deconstruct, another important manual discourse from nineteenth-century America, one that commanded a great deal of attention in the antebellum South but was fading rapidly from view by the time of the novel's publication. In the public theater of the affair of honor and its attendant discourse of the *code duello*, elite white men of the South found a ritual solution to vexing problems of personal identity, social intelligibility, and class solidarity, a solution that in its most extreme form, the duel, pivoted on the dexterity and decorum of the human hand. Twain's novel evokes the ritual and social spectacle of the duel in two impor-

tant episodes. One, stretching across five chapters, is quite explicit: a conflict between *A* and Luigi that is quickly nipped in the bud by legal action, only to resurface in a full-blown affair of honor between Luigi and Judge Driscoll. The other is more implicit, as the extralegal ceremony of dueling is sublimated into the legal ceremony of Luigi's murder trial, where the courtroom principals duel mainly with words. But in both cases, dueling fails to perform its ritual function, in large part because hands and words fail in their appointed roles.

Whether penning notes, dispensing gifts, or, as a last resort, taking up pistols or other handheld weapons, the human hand was a conspicuous presence in the discourse and custom of the antebellum affair of honor. The meticulous attention paid to the activity and placement of the hands on the field of honor, for example, can be seen in contemporary dueling manuals such as *The Code of Honor; or, Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Duelling*, published in Charleston in 1838 by John Lyde Wilson, "ex-Governor of South Carolina" but presumably no relation to Twain's hero (see, for instance, 98, 103–104). To violate these rules was to endanger not only the honor of the dueling parties but the integrity of the duel itself. Hands thus emerged from within dueling protocol as principal guarantors and agents of elite white male honor.

The duel, however, linked manual agency and honorable conduct in a more indirect manner than we might at first suppose. It would be a mistake to assume that the duelist won honor primarily by inscribing his will upon the body of another with bullet or blade, by asserting and extending himself through physical force. Historians of the affair of honor, such as Kenneth S. Greenberg and Steven M. Stowe, argue instead that the duelist's defense of his honor had less to do with demonstrating mastery of arms, achieving personal vengeance, injuring or killing the opponent, or even winning, than with dramatizing his willingness to place his body directly in harm's way.[55] According to Greenberg, "the central purpose of a duel was not to kill, but to be threatened with death" (74). Fearlessness in the face of death was thought to be the "central virtue" of the southern man of honor, one of the principal ways in which he distinguished himself from his social inferiors, particularly slaves.

Rather than a winner and a loser, then, the ideal antebellum duel resulted in two winners, two men who had "risked death equally in the name of . . . honor and the common good" (Stowe 20). And in this equality of risk we begin to see a larger social function emerging in dueling ritual. As the product of a "failure to agree upon meaning" between honorable men (10), the affair of honor signaled a dangerous breach in the class solidarity of southern gentlemen, a solidarity essential to their grip on power as a tiny minority surrounded and vastly outnumbered by poor whites, women, and slaves.

Beyond the personal reputation of the contending parties, then, the authority of the ruling elite itself was very much at stake whenever two gentlemen quarreled publicly over honor. In such cases, it was as vital to restore social equality between the principals as to rehabilitate their individual reputations, and the genius of the duel was to allow one of these functions to be mapped directly onto the other, to stage a physical confrontation between gentlemen that allowed them to reestablish the edifice of elite white male power in the act of repairing personal honor and social meaning, demonstrating their integrity and their equality first to each other and then, through their seconds and other witnesses, to the elite class as a whole and to the wider community beyond it (Greenberg 58; Stowe 14). Whether the principals survived this suturing operation was in some sense secondary to the larger work of "shoring up the social order" and "bringing its ideals out on display" (Stowe 22).

It is important to note that, at least in theory, the duel conferred honor not only equally but *reciprocally* upon the principals. For a gentleman to face death fearlessly on the field of honor, the threat of death had to be credible, yet that threat could only be as credible as the marksmanship or swordsmanship of the rival. It is in this sense that Greenberg writes of the bullet as a gift, the most important among the many typically exchanged between gentlemen in affairs of honor, and of the exchange of shots as "a double gift exchange" (74). With this exchange, each principal acknowledged that he was meeting a fellow gentleman on the field of honor, and each "gave his adversary a chance to demonstrate that he did not fear death." For this gift to fulfill its honorific function, however, each man had to possess enough dexterity with the weapon to place his rival in genuine danger. In addition, as the published codes attest, a gentleman could not attempt to minimize his own risk by shielding his torso, seeking an advantageous firing grip, or otherwise using his hands to gain an unfair edge over his adversary. Here the reciprocal dimension of the dueling ceremony finds expression in a language of manual agency that harbors a paradox: it is never the duelist's own hand that confers honor upon him. That hand could only *dis*honor him, through manual infractions like the ones just listed. Only the sure and steady hand of his adversary could bring him what he sought. In this way dueling protocol reminded the southern gentleman that his identity and reputation were not his exclusive property but products of a social compact, gifts bestowed on him by his elite peers.

With typical irreverence, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* records the breakdown of this established circuit of meaning. From its first appearance in the novel, when Roxana and her fellow slave Jasper engage in a "friendly duel" of wits beneath Wilson's window (8), the duel is already compromised as an exclusive ritual of elite white male identity, solidarity, and supremacy. Slaves, after all, were defined categorically by the ruling class as without honor (Ayers 26;

Greenberg xiii). For slaves to "duel," for the phenomenon to be *introduced* to the reader in the form of an affair between slaves, immediately contradicts the timocratic principles upon which the dueling ceremony is founded, and the fact that one of the dueling slaves is visually indistinguishable from a white person would seem to undercut the pretensions to racial purity of the ruling/dueling class itself. This is hardly a gratuitous move on Twain's part. Indeed, in one way or another, every dueling scene in the novel is tainted not just by the presence but by the participation of characters from outside the white male elite: slaves, women, African Americans. This is already enough to suggest that the duel is derelict in its duty of consolidating and legitimating the power of southern gentlemen.[56]

The affair of honor between Luigi Capello and Judge Driscoll does little to contradict this impression. This duel happens only because *A* has dishonored himself by refusing to challenge Luigi after being kicked in the seat of the pants during a rowdy anti-temperance meeting (56). Instead, he takes Luigi to court, prompting the ire of his uncle, who disinherits him (for the second time in the novel!) and challenges Luigi himself (60). When Luigi accepts, the judge's remarks to his second, Pembroke Howard, reveal his understanding of the logic of equality and reciprocity that governs the affair: "He's a darling! Why, it's an honor as well as a pleasure to stand up before such a man" (66). What the judge doesn't know, of course, is that his reprobate ward, whose legal identity by definition places him beyond the pale of honor, has in an ironic sense preserved the social and racial integrity of the affair of honor by staying out of it and instead choosing the more plebeian venue of the law court. Even *A*'s near-participation, however, hints at the vulnerability of the duel and its elite constituency to contamination from without—or, if we prefer to view *A* as a racial impostor, to an even more damaging contamination from within.

Fittingly, the duel that does take place is a farcical and remarkably impure affair, which only compounds the sense of social disorder and crisis it is meant to resolve. Its violence exceeds the tightly prescribed limits of the dueling codes, spilling out beyond the principals to deface property, as bullets slam into the walls and windows of a nearby house, and to wound bystanders such as Roxana, who is nearly disfigured by a stray shot as she watches unnoticed from next door (71). Her inadvertent participation in the duel as a woman of color (though no longer a slave) once again undercuts its economy of honor, since she has demonstrated much the same fearlessness in the face of physical danger as the principals and bears the scar to prove it. On the other hand, the fact that a person so far afield has found herself in harm's way casts serious doubt on the shooting skill of the duelists. Luigi *is* hit in the shoulder and nicked on the hand and cheekbone, and a bullet from his gun grazes the judge's hair (72), but it is also true that the two men shoot up half

the neighborhood. In this context Luigi's hand wound becomes particularly intriguing. It seems to be to his awkward hand, since the principals continue to exchange shots after he receives it (71). This may suggest that the judge's shot was simply wide of the mark, but it may also more disturbingly suggest that the shot was on the mark but that Luigi was holding his awkward hand in front of his body, in flagrant violation of the code. And why, for that matter, do the two men go on shooting when, according to the code, any wound serious enough to leave the shooting hand unsteady is supposed to end the duel then and there (John Wilson 103)? Wouldn't shoulder *and* hand wounds be enough to put Luigi at a distinct disadvantage, and if so, why does the judge, a man of honor, continue to press his advantage? And if the wounds are all so superficial as to permit the duel to continue legitimately, round after round, we circle back to the question of why these gentlemen aren't better marksmen.

Worst of all is that the duel ultimately resolves nothing.[57] The conflict between the principals resurfaces almost immediately when *A* leads the judge to believe that Luigi is a "confessed assassin" who has misrepresented his character and dishonored the judge by accepting his challenge "as if he were a gentleman" (79). Driscoll responds by publicly impugning Luigi's character during a political speech, prompting a challenge from the Italian, which the judge now refuses. At this point, Wilson explains to Luigi, "[t]he unwritten law of the region requires you to kill Judge Driscoll on sight, and he and the community will expect that attention at your hands—though of course your own death by his bullet will answer every purpose" (93). From the initial lawsuit and the extralegal but highly formalized affair of honor, the dispute thus spirals downward toward the lawless sphere of retributive violence, ending only when Driscoll's murder forces the reintervention of the legal system.

Since the murder trial of the Capello twins is in effect a continuation of the dispute that brought Luigi and the judge together on the field of honor, it should come as no surprise that Twain presents the trial as a kind of duel, a fact also noted by Vince Brewton (115–116). Here, however, the principals have been replaced, or displaced, by the representatives of the legal system in its formal mediating function. Not incidentally, both of these representatives come with dueling credentials. Pembroke Howard, the prosecuting attorney, is not just a Virginia gentleman but "an authority on the 'code,' and a man always courteously ready to stand up before you in the field if any act or word of his had seemed doubtful or suspicious to you, and explain it with any weapon you might prefer, from brad-awls to artillery" (4). And defense attorney Wilson made his support for dueling ideology clear when he, like Judge Driscoll, chided *A* for taking Luigi to court (62–63). More important, both attorneys have just served as seconds in the Driscoll-Capello duel and in effect recapitulate this function in the courtroom, where Wilson "stands" for

Luigi and Howard "stands" for justice in the name of the fallen Driscoll. Wilson's participation in a ceremony that enlists manual agency to smooth over social conflict and to resolve disputes over character seems consistent with his appeals elsewhere to other manual discourses to achieve similar goals. Moreover, his emergence as an advocate of the duel, which plays a large part in rehabilitating his public reputation and underwriting his reemergence as a citizen (74), reveals the shrinking gap between the values of this former jokester and *eiron* and those of the community that once dishonored and insulted him.[58]

As the trial progresses, however, and as Wilson approaches the momentous discovery that will free his client, the narrative emphasis begins to shift from the rhetorical contest between the attorneys to a duel of words and wits between Wilson and *A*. *A* is first to signal his awareness of this behind-the-scenes drama and takes perverse pleasure in his role in it, dropping in on Wilson to goad him at the end of the trial's first day. Having thus cleared the field of all but the principals in this rapidly materializing affair of dishonor, Twain leaves *A* to exchange a few (cheap) shots with Wilson before making his fatal error. Fittingly, that error is a manual infraction, the handling and inadvertent imprinting of a glass slide. It is, moreover, an infraction that points to a pair of similar but much more serious infractions, the stabbing of Judge Driscoll and the earlier, surreptitious exchange of infants in the cradle. Thus, it will doubly dishonor *A*, first by exposing him as an assassin (the accusation with which he attempted to dishonor Luigi falls upon his own head), and then by exposing his legal identity as a Negro and slave, precipitating his plunge from the ranks of southern gentlemen into the condition of those categorically without honor.[59]

It remains only for Wilson to present this chain of inference in the courtroom to bring his "duel" with *A* to an end. As he does so the following morning, he keeps an eye on *A* for signs that his verbal volleys are landing, at one point exclaiming to himself, "It was a success—he's hit!" (107). Significantly, being "hit" in this way can bring *A* no honor. As in a proper duel, his adversary has threatened him with death ("make upon the window the fingerprints that will hang you!"), but that threat is no longer a gift that mends personal reputation and confirms the recipient's membership in a timocratic elite. Instead, it is an act of aggression that punishes and ostracizes. Now reclassified beyond the social and racial pale of honor, *A* is no longer in a position to profit from the danger in which he placed himself by first "challenging" and then "dueling" Wilson. Instead, the social capital generated by the event falls solely to his adversary, who is now the toast of Dawson's Landing.

But Twain's account leaves room for doubt whether Wilson's conduct has in any fundamentally timocratic sense brought him honor. For one thing, Wilson has never been in physical danger during the affair. Though threat-

ened with ridicule, he is at no time threatened with death, unlike his adversary, whom he threatens with the gallows. Thus, for Wilson, the contest is hardly a duel, hardly honorable, at all. Moreover, when Wilson in effect "gives the lie" to *A*, unmasking the inner "negro and slave" concealed beneath his white exterior and thus "announcing that his appearance differ[s] from his true nature" (Greenberg 9), he ironically transforms the terms of the affair in a way that directly undercuts its legitimacy, leaving himself on the field with a dishonorable adversary. This is the same situation in which the judge found himself (or, more precisely, believed he had found himself) with Luigi Capello, and as the judge recognized, it is not a situation in which a man can find honor. Even as it traces the historical absorption of the antebellum duel into more mediated, legal forms of conflict resolution, then, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* voices anxiety about the importation of that troubling ritual and its uncertain logic of manual agency into the legal framework of U.S. society. Whether on the field of honor or in the court of law, the duelist's hand proves no safeguard against the vagaries of personal reputation and the malfunctions in social solidarity that haunt the shaky white elite of Dawson's Landing.

The Products of Their Own Hands

Like the turn-of-the-century figures and projects I began this chapter by describing, David Wilson quests for a reliable source of order and value in a time of growing doubt about the stability of identity, society, and meaning. How or why does this quest lead him, along with so many others, to and through the hands? The answer lies at least in part in the conditions of economic stress and flux that characterized both the era of the novel's setting and the era of its publication. Certainly Wilson knows something of these conditions firsthand, having seen his personal fortunes and social status rise and fall so rapidly and unpredictably on the antebellum Missouri frontier. He can enjoy no monopoly over such knowledge, however, in a novel that also features debilitating gambling sprees, doomed business speculations, the legal and surreptitious sale of human beings, the theft of personal property, the collapse of wildcat banks, the deathbed manumission of slaves, busted and restored wills, the instantaneous migration of racial and legal status from body to body, and the disputed ownership of half a dog.

An atmosphere of economic crisis pervades this text, much of which, as John Carlos Rowe has noted, unfolds beneath the long shadow of the Panic of 1837 ("Fatal Speculations" 145–147). Rowe is surely right to suggest that this economic instability contributes to a general instability concerning identity in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, which stages a dizzying game of musical chairs with "Tom," "Chambers," "son," "heir," "slave," "mother," "negro," "mas-

ter," "pauper," "pudd'nhead," and numerous other titles used to designate personal or social identity. Even the spectral presences that haunt Dawson's Landing can be read as a further legacy of economic upheaval, grim reminders of the displacements, dispossessions, and disavowals that so often follow in its wake: lost pets, uprooted tenants, black drifters, abandoned elders, luckless girls left to fend for themselves—a veritable gallery of the marginal and neglected, human and creaturely residues that put the lie to period conceptions of national belonging as universal or unproblematic.[60] This is all a far cry from the soothing stability attributed to plantation identity and society by proslavery ideology in Wilson's time or by "Old South" mythology in Twain's. Indeed, in the wide-open economic environment of Dawson's Landing, identity itself threatens to become a purely speculative venture—and a most volatile one at that.

Twain was only a small child in 1837, but by the time he published *Pudd'nhead Wilson* more recent historical and personal events had given him ample firsthand experience with the sort of economic dislocation and general instability he portrays in the novel. Alan Trachtenberg has characterized the period from 1873 to 1896, during which Twain published most of his important novels, as one long depression (39–40), punctuated by hundreds of bank failures and tens of thousands of strikes (88–89) as the nation struggled to adjust to the legal, economic, political, and cultural reorganization that Trachtenberg calls the incorporation of America. Wiebe describes a "distended society" during this period (11–43) that embarked upon an anxious "search for order" that led to an increasingly managerial, bureaucratic, and rationalized economy. These large-scale innovations in turn threatened the authority and cohesiveness of families, communities, and the "village values" that sustained and made sense of them (134, 136). They also threatened the integrity of individual persons and bodies. Mark Seltzer has described the emergence of a new "machine culture" that engineered unfamiliar and disturbing linkages between bodies and machines, generating "uncanny hesitations about bodies and identities" (132) and "panic about agency" (145) that found literary expression in the emergent genre Seltzer christens "melodramas of uncertain agency" (17–18, 84), a category in which it would hardly be a stretch to include *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Gilded Age urbanization depopulated the rural countryside (Trachtenberg 114), leaving communities haunted by vestigial or dislocated subjectivities, much like the Dawson's Landing of Twain's novel.[61] And the rationalization of industrial processes brought new refinements in the division of labor that reclassified—and objectified—economic subjects as "heads" and "hands" (Seltzer 95, 130–131), even as the "mechanized violence" of large-scale manufacturing placed "fingers and limbs" at risk from the ever faster, ever larger, ever more "unguarded moving parts" of the factory floor or assembly line (Trachtenberg 91).

But the dislocation and upheaval of Gilded Age America did not end there. The era also saw the rise of new media machines that revolutionized the storage of sensory and verbal information. As German media theorist Friedrich Kittler has detailed in several books, with the advent of phonograph technology in the 1870s and film technology in the 1890s, acoustic and optical data were no longer subject to transcription into the symbolic systems of alphabetic (phonetic) writing and musical notation but could instead be recorded, stored, and retrieved directly by machines. With the invention of the typewriter in the late 1860s, writing itself as a mode of information storage was no longer the exclusive province of the secretary, amanuensis, or stenographer but instead achieved new levels of mechanization and standardization that moved verbal data ever further from the vagaries and idiosyncrasies of handwriting and penmanship. These new body-machine linkages had profound consequences for turn-of-the-century subjects, especially in the potential they carried for uncoupling the signs of individuality and subjectivity—voice, visual features, gestures, expressions, verbal style—from the presence and continuity of the body. Kittler notes, for instance, how typewriter technology "unlinks hand, eye, and letter" within the cognitive circuit of writing (*Discourse Networks* 195), introducing a discontinuity upon which Seltzer elaborates:

> [T]he typewriter disarticulates the relays that allow for the circular *translation* from mind to hand to eye to mind (the translation between prelinguistic inwardness and the expressive materiality of writing, such that the eye guides what the hand does that the eye reads). . . . The linking of hand, eye, and letter in the act of writing by hand intimates the translation from mind to hand to eye and hence from the inward and invisible and spiritual to the outward and visible and physical, projecting in effect "the continuous transition from nature to culture." The typewriter, like the telegraph, replaces, or pressures, that fantasy of continuous transition with recalcitrantly visible and material systems of difference: with the standardized spacing of keys and letters; with the dislocation of where the hands work, where the letters strike and appear, where the eyes look, if they look at all. (10)

Fittingly, this particular media revolution was itself a product of the economic revolution wrought by the machine culture and incorporative logic of the Gilded Age. As Kittler delights in observing, the industrialist and arms manufacturer Eliphalet Remington turned to the mass production of typewriters in 1874 "simply because 'after the Civil War boom things had been on the slow side,' and they had 'more capacity than they were using'" (*Gramophone* 191). His company simply "transferred 'the standardization of the component parts of weapons, which had been widely practiced since the Napoleonic Wars,' to civil writing instruments" (190). Hence Kittler's relish in dubbing the typewriter "the discourse machine-gun" (*Literature* 44).

As it turned out, Mark Twain was at the center of these Gilded Age technological and economic dramas. In 1874, the year Remington began manufacturing typewriters, Twain purchased a Remington Model I and subsequently used it to prepare the manuscript of *Tom Sawyer* for submission to his publisher. As Kittler notes, this became the first typescript in the history of literature (*Gramophone* 192). Twain also typed up a whimsical endorsement of his new machine that Remington used to promote sales (192–193). Twain's enthusiasm for the machine was apparently undampened by the more troubling, uncanny, and modern aspects of what we might call typewriter ontology—the ironies noted above by Kittler and Seltzer—with which he undoubtedly would have become acquainted in using the device. Indeed, an appreciation for the way the typewriter "fuses composition and publication" (Kittler, *Discourse Networks* 259) and thus mimics as it miniaturizes and personalizes the technological and social functions of the printing press (Kittler, *Gramophone* 228) may have helped spur Twain's interest in the invention that would reentangle him in the volatile economic forces of the 1890s, the Paige typesetting machine.

As an innovation in the printing industry that reflected the general trend of period manufacturing toward capital-intensive production strategies, the Paige machine was billed as an answer to the labor-intensive process of setting type by hand. Its purpose, in other words, was to automate a formerly manual task. For this very reason, it would also, if it proved a success, usher in significant social displacements, instantly propelling a generation of skilled print-shop "hands" into technological obsolescence and economic marginalization. The Paige typesetter announced this social agenda in an especially cruel and egregious way: according to Seltzer, part of the charm of the new invention for Twain was the elegant way in which it mimicked the bodily movements of the human compositor it would be putting out of work (9). As an eager investor, Twain seems to have had no qualms about the collateral social damage the machine would cause. But the way of the laborer proved to be the way of the venture capitalist as well: the machine devoured money. Biographer Justin Kaplan estimates that Twain sank around $190,000 into the machine (376), close to $5 million in 2010 dollars, and enough at the time to bankrupt his publishing house, Charles L. Webster & Co.[62] At this point, the abyss of reason facing Twain had become something far more harrowing than the epistemological impasse sketched by Cottom; the rationalization of the production process was threatening, in a most material way, to hurl a bestselling author into the ranks of the economically dispossessed.

In turning during this period to the predictions of a palmist as a personal lifeline, a source of hope and self-belief, Twain was arguably participating in a version of what Bill Brown calls the era's "sentimental materialism" (93), a manual discourse that assigned authenticity, integrity, and value to the work

of the hands. In a lively and informative study of material culture in modern America, folklorist Simon J. Bronner links the popular and academic valorization of folk arts and crafts in the twentieth century to a developing awareness in the preceding century that industrialization and its attendant transformations were taking a direct toll on the hands and handiwork of laboring men and women (see especially 87–160). A similar awareness among European artists and intellectuals was responsible for what Elaine Scarry describes as a late nineteenth-century "literature of creation" culminating in Twain's contemporaries Thomas Hardy and Émile Zola, in which the hands, as primary agents of material making, "became the most resonant and meaning-laden part of the human anatomy" (*Resisting* 75). As handcrafted items became increasingly rare in markets saturated by machine-made goods, the handmade, or "folk," object, together with the hand that shaped it, became a powerful cultural symbol of an earlier, more organic, authentic, and unalienated moment in the histories of society and labor, when the work of hands brought a sense of self-worth to laboring Americans that remained largely or at least somewhat uncompromised by industrial-age ironies (see Lears, *No Place* 60–61, 80–83). The artists and artisans of folk culture came to be revered by scholars, collectors, and American consumers for their ability to "craft spiritual meaning through the direct control of their hands in the security of community" (Bronner 158). Thus Thorstein Veblen could refer admiringly to the "honorific marks of hand labor" in his 1899 *Theory of the Leisure Class* (qtd. in Sekula 58). The hand and its labors came to function as important late-century sites of moral struggle, sources of leverage against the seismic disturbances of capital for Americans anxious that in a mass society and an industrial economy they would "become objects rather than make them" (Bronner 158). In holding out hope that the lines and folds of his own hand might tell a more sanguine story of the writer's relationship to capitalism than the riches-to-rags narrative that he appeared to be living out in real time in the 1890s, Twain joined in that larger struggle to counter what historian Jackson Lears calls "the crisis of cultural authority" plaguing the era by reinvesting the human body with moral meaning (see Lears, *No Place* 4–58).[63]

But *Pudd'nhead Wilson* knows better. In its conjoined critiques of fingerprinting, palm reading, dueling, and what Saidiya Hartman calls the slave mode of production (93), the novel echoes instead the more sobering mid-century manual discourse developed by Karl Marx as part of his distinctly unsentimental brand of materialism. Marx recognized in the hand the prototypical instrument and image of the productive activity through which human beings create and transform the material conditions of their being and thus actualize themselves. "No production [is] possible," he wrote in *Grundrisse*, "without an instrument of production, even if this instrument

is only the hand. No production without stored-up, past labor, even if it is only the facility gathered together and concentrated in the hand of the savage by repeated practice" (85–86).[64] As the century progressed, however, this originary instrument was supplanted by ever more complex and dehumanizing ones, as manual labor yielded to automated production processes and the site of labor shifted from the homeplace to factories and other regimented, impersonal spaces, in which production was tailored (and later Taylorized) to the demands of capital rather than the needs of the individual worker.[65] Increasingly, hands that had been engaged in the "positive, creative activity" (614) of grasping, shaping, and in the fullest sense *crafting* things, an activity that conferred value not just upon the made items but upon the making self as well, found themselves operating machines that performed these tasks—or, worse, being abruptly displaced by such machines. As opposed to the hand tool, which in Marx retains links to a craft economy, empowering the worker both as his personal property and as the extension of his independent agency, the industrial machine, as the property of the capitalist, renders the worker "dependent" and "appropriated" (702), in effect just one more machine, though a less valuable, more expendable one. This antagonism between machinery and the hands that operated it could reach horrifying heights, as in the case, documented by Marx, of children herded into manufactories for ten-hour days of spinning silk, who "were quite simply slaughtered for the sake of their delicate fingers, just as horned cattle are slaughtered in southern Russia for their hides and their fat" (*Capital* 406). On the American side of the Atlantic in the watershed year of 1903, the labor organizer Mother Jones witnessed the plight of boys and girls working in the textile mills of Kensington, Pennsylvania: "Every day little children came into Union Headquarters, some with their hands off, some with the thumb missing, some with their fingers off at the knuckle" (qtd. in Zinn 338). These young workers could be considered expendable chattel precisely because they had been reduced to, objectified as, their fingers and nothing more, anatomized like the production process itself (and like the lowly dog of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*) into a collection of discrete, manipulable parts and functions. This indifference of production to human welfare is also registered in the increasing currency of the term "hand" during the nineteenth century as a synonym and synecdoche for "worker," but a worker for hire rather than, say, an independent artisan or small farmer—a worker, in other words, ultimately subservient to some employer, machine, or industrial process (see Roediger 49–50).

Describing alienated labor in terms borrowed in part from the famous opening of *The German Ideology*, Marx writes, "Just as man is governed, in religion, by the products of his own brain, so, in capitalist production, he is governed by the products of his own hand" (*Capital* 772; see also 165). Marx

traces all material value, all wealth, to the transformative activity of human labor; there is, in the last instance, no other source. He thus singles out the workers who supply that labor as *primary* producers, the true and only makers of the human lifeworld. They and they alone create and transform the material conditions of society. The perverse irony of capitalism, then, is that the laboring classes create both the commodities that are fetishized under capitalist production as intrinsic sources of value rather than as products of value-creating activity (see especially 163–177), and the capitalists who market, sell, and control those commodities.[66] Under the mystifications of capitalism, workers create the conditions of their own oppression. Caught between the commodities into which they pour value and the owners who siphon off that value from them, they are undone by the work of their own hands.

In this respect they have much in common with the characters of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Marx's account of capitalist alienation would make a good epigraph for Twain's novel, where it is in fact loosely paraphrased by *A*, who exclaims (apropos of palmistry) that "a man's own hand is his deadliest enemy!" (52). This is certainly true in the case of *A* himself: the gambling debts that get him disinherited, the violent assault on his benefactor that leads to his undoing, and in particular the fingerprints that expose him as the author of an otherwise perfect crime are all quite literally the products, the material work, of his own hand. As Katherine Rowe observes, *A*'s fingerprint becomes in effect an alienable commodity when it enters the legal system; insofar as it "must be lifted, transferred, and read in order legally to establish [his] presence and identity, it remains a kind of property never possessed by the person it is proper to—conditioned by and resulting in dispossession" (186). Expropriated from its maker and duly fetishized by Wilson at the murder trial, it participates actively not only in *A*'s alienation but in his expropriation by the Driscoll estate.

Marx's formula also applies to Judge Driscoll, murdered by the ingrate he helped produce—and corrupt—with his "generous hand" (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 112). But it may apply most poignantly to Roxana, whose fate is literally to be governed—indeed enslaved—by the product of her own hand, the child she has single-handedly produced as her master by the manual and all too transformative labor of moving him from cradle to cradle, clothing him in the habiliments of privilege, and catering to his arrogant whims.[67] And she is not just enslaved but *re*enslaved, sold back into slavery—and down the river to boot—at the hands of the boy she has lifted out of bondage, a boy whom she worshipped as "her darling, her master, and her deity, all in one" (19). (Talk about fetishizing a commodity!) These examples suggest that the hands of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* function less often as instruments of self-actualization than as instruments of self-alienation, self-

dispossession, and self-destruction. In this way, the novel registers the crisis of capitalist alienation that prompted Americans of Twain's era to turn nostalgically to a preindustrial past for images of unalienated manual labor and decisive manual agency, even as it records the frustrated or equivocal efforts by representatives of just such a bygone order to shore up meaning and identity against the social and economic turbulence of slavery through manual activity and imagery.[68] *Pudd'nhead Wilson* confirms that the hand, even (or perhaps especially) the antebellum, preindustrial hand, can ultimately offer no purchase or remedy against the alienation Marx described, only a displaced, ironic/iconic version of it.

Late in his career, long after the publication of Twain's novel, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein drew on the body's aura of material concreteness in order to frame the epistemological question of doubt and certainty. "If you do know that *here is one hand*," he wrote, "we'll grant you all the rest" (qtd. in Sacks 43). By Wittgenstein's criteria, the world of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is as awash in uncertainty and instability as it is possible for a world to be. The hands of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* refuse to be *one*: traversed by multiple identities and agencies, they inevitably differ from themselves, material remainders that disrupt the national fantasy of democratic possibility in a society whose investments in human bondage render citizenship the furthest thing from impersonal, disembodied, or even particularly admirable. Those hands refuse to be *here*; they remain hopelessly evasive, out of place. And they refuse to behave as exemplary philosophical, economic, or social objects, to offer the kind of foundation upon which one might build "all the rest." They crystallize the perverse, contradictory logic linking the economic and cultural landscapes of the antebellum South and the turn-of-the-century United States, where, as Marx knew, a man's own hand could become the instrument of his undoing, his deadliest enemy.

CHAPTER TWO

Listening for Zora

Voice, Body, and the Mediat(iz)ed Modernism of Jonah's Gourd Vine *and* Moses, Man of the Mountain

> The narrative of African American history has yet to incorporate the centrality of the modern mass media to how African Americans conceive of themselves as a people, how they communicate with one another, and how they preserve, transmit, and transform their music, culture, politics, and religion.
> —Barbara Savage

Even as it exposes the futility of nineteenth-century efforts to read identity from the body through visual inspection—of hands, skin, finger marks, and other physical indices—*Pudd'nhead Wilson* flirts with the possibility that such epistemological certainty might nonetheless be found in a different bodily attribute manifesting in a different sensory register. Early in the novel, as he labors over "a set of tangled account books" (7), David Wilson is "disturbed" (8) by an animated conversation between a pair of unseen speakers. The conversation, which he overhears through an open window, goes like this:

> "Say, Roxy, how does yo' baby come on?" This from the distant voice.
> "Fust rate; how does *you* come on, Jasper?" This yell was from close by.
> "Oh, I's middlin'; hain't got nothin' to complain of. I's gwyne to come a-court'n you bime by, Roxy."
> "*You* is, you black mud-cat! Yah-yah-yah! I got sump'n better to do den 'sociat'n wid niggers as black as you is. Is ole Miss Cooper's Nancy done give you de mitten?" Roxy followed this sally with another discharge of care-free laughter. (8)

As Wilson moves to the window "to observe the combatants" directly, to attach bodies and identities to these invisible voices, he performs an act that is sufficiently noteworthy in its epistemological complexities to prompt elaborate commentary from the narrator. For while the first speaker, Jasper, can be

swiftly and unproblematically identified as "young, coal-black, and of magnificent build," possessed of a body that follows predictably from his voice, in the case of the second speaker the sensory information that presents itself to Wilson and the reader proves more troublesome and contradictory. "From Roxy's manner of speech, a stranger would have expected her to be black, but she was not." On the contrary, her skin is "very fair, with the rosy glow of vigorous health in the cheeks," her brown hair is "fine" and "soft" in texture, and her eyes are a racially inconclusive brown. "To all intents and purposes," then, Roxana's visible features proclaim her to be "as white as anybody" (8), even as the aural evidence, produced from deep within the body's unviewable interior and rendered textually remarkable by Twain's conspicuous eye dialect, suggests otherwise.

As does the narrator. Although Roxana "was not" black to the naked eye, she nonetheless *is* black in what is arguably a far more consequential way. The "one-sixteenth" part of her racial ancestry that is African American or perhaps African—most likely the legacy of an enslaved great-great grandmother subjected to the sexual conquest of a free white man—is sufficiently powerful to have "out-voted the other fifteen parts and made [Roxana] a negro" (8–9) by the one-drop racial convention that governed the novel's era (if not necessarily Roxana's own). That minuscule but decisive degree of blackness may not "show" visibly (8), but it does *tell* audibly, through Roxana's heavily racialized dialect. That voice anchors her identity in her body in a way that skin, hair, and eyes ultimately cannot. For a society whose long history of race mixing rendered visual signs ever less reliable as a source of racial information (see Joel Williamson, *New People* 103; M. Smith 40–41), Roxana's nonnormative voice holds out the reassuring promise that race and thus the world remain knowable. From the sound of that voice, a stranger would expect her to be black—and she is. Here, at the outset of a novel haunted by the search for "physical autograph[s]" (108), the voice would seem to offer the surest of "sure identifier[s]" (109). In his novel's first scene to feature African American characters as speaking subjects, Twain thus introduces us to the problems and possibilities, the racial politics and the body politics that attend the literary representation of voice.

In the twentieth century, perhaps no writer better illustrates the challenges and rewards of writing voice than Zora Neale Hurston. Indeed, the concept of voice holds a special place in scholarship about Hurston and her works. Improvising on the Barthesian categories of the *lisible* and the *scriptible*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. coined the term "speakerly" to evoke the intimate links between Hurston's prose style and the rhythms, textures, and other material elements of the colloquial voice (*Signifying* 181). Karla F. C. Holloway also invented a new term, "oracy," to capture Hurston's thorough

grounding in and mastery of the oral currents of African American expressive culture, with their historical roots in the legally enforced illiteracy of the slavery era and even deeper transatlantic roots in West African theophilosophical traditions of *nommo*, the mysterious and powerful "word-force" behind spoken utterance (*Character* 37).[1] Hurston's writings have also drawn the attention of feminist scholars for whom "voice" functions in a looser, less material context, as a general term for such modes of agency as self-expression, self-representation, and self-possession.[2] Whether vernacular, feminist, or womanist in its primary emphasis, Hurston criticism frequently draws on organicist principles to celebrate the writer's integration of mind, body, and voice in powerful textual assertions of personhood.

Yet as I hope to show in this chapter, such critical holism cannot adequately account for Hurston's considerably more complex and problematic deployments of voice in her writings. She would not have disagreed with film critic John Belton's characterization of voice as one of the principal "attributes of the human body" (337), grounded in the latter's material immediacy and idiosyncrasy. But her works also demonstrate an awareness of a more tenuous relationship between voice and body, and of the exhilarating, alienating, or uncanny effects that arise when voices get loose from bodies, migrate from body to body or between bodies and objects, hover sourcelessly above or beyond the plane of human interactions, or are otherwise out of place. This awareness in turn powerfully informs Hurston's understanding of her characters as speaking subjects and of subjectivity itself as a more vexed and modern phenomenon than traditional Hurston scholarship has typically acknowledged. I want to suggest that Hurston's insights into the dissociability of voice and body and its implications for the modern subject were prompted in part by the rise of new technologies for the storage, retrieval, and transmission of aural information that allowed sounds, including human voices, to be lifted from their original sources and manipulated independently of them. A number of these new technologies were perfected and popularized during Hurston's formative years as an artist; indeed, Hurston had hands-on experience with several of them, including phonography, radio, and sound film, during her career as an author, anthropological fieldworker, and public intellectual.[3] In this chapter, I will revisit the issue of voice in two Hurston novels from the 1930s, her most productive decade as a writer, in the specific context of these emergent sound technologies, pairing each novel with one of the new media formations.

In the case of Hurston's first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), the companion technology is the phonograph. Not only does the text mimic phonography in its meticulous reproductions of the sound field of black modernity in the U.S. South, its protagonist, the Baptist minister John Pearson, serves as

the human equivalent of Edison's talking machine, storing and transmitting the rhythms, vocalizations, and other aural traces of African American life in the region, as if explicitly emulating the recording and playback functions of early gramophones. Yet John's role as a living sound archive also contributes to doubts about his coherence and consistency as a subject, placing him at a remove from himself and leaving his fellow characters (and many readers) baffled and frustrated about who he "really" is and where the sources of his strange authority as a cultural figure ultimately lie.

I will also examine Hurston's third novel, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), which grafts the story of the Hebrew exodus onto modern narratives of black diaspora and contemporary world events to produce a rich historical palimpsest that strongly correlates national leadership with the projection and amplification of voice. The novel taps directly into the cultures of radio and the loudspeaker in the 1930s and the uses to which those technologies were put by a variety of political regimes in the West. In her depictions of Moses and his God, Jehovah, Hurston evokes contemporary constructions of the leader as voice, transcending the limitations of the body via the airwaves of radio or the sound waves generated by electronic amplification to forge a political collectivity (that of "people," "folk," or "nation") out of disparate listeners. Broadcasting voice in this way, however, dissociating it from body, also entails a degree of risk for public figures whose words and authority are neither confined to the body nor ultimately grounded in it, an irony Hurston registers in her ambivalent portraits of Moses and the Hebrew God.

In developing what I propose is a new way of listening to and for Hurston's voice(s), I am building on the theoretical, historical, and critical work of Friedrich Kittler, Sara Danius, Tim Armstrong, Alice Yaeger Kaplan, Juan Suárez, Jeffrey Sconce, Douglas Kahn, and the growing body of scholars who approach modernism as the expressive response to a new sensorium created by the mechanical modes of information storage and transmission that arose in the second half of the nineteenth century to challenge the hegemony of writing. Approaching Hurston in these terms has the advantage of keeping us on guard against critical oversimplifications of the relationship between voice and embodiment in her work. It also helps shed new light on some old questions surrounding these particular novels, questions of characterization and authorial tone. Finally, it reveals perhaps unsuspected affinities between Hurston and an international cadre of modernist writers who set out to map the new soundscapes of the twentieth century, including James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Thomas Mann, Bram Stoker, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Sigmund Freud—a cohort to which Hurston scholars, preoccupied with canons of African American and female authorship, have so far been reluctant to assign her.

The Black Dialect Voice: Phonetics and Politics, Sonics and Somatics

It is ironic but also somehow fitting that in the episode from *Pudd'nhead Wilson* that introduces the reader to the supposed sounds of racial blackness, Twain refers to Roxana's one-sixteenth African lineage as "out-vot[ing]" her more extensive white ancestry and in effect electing her as black.[4] In much the same manner, sound outvotes sight—voice overrides visual imagery—in the sensory calculus that determines Roxana's racial identity for the casual witness. By 1893, Twain was working within a well-established tradition of white-authored African American dialect writing that relied heavily on sound as a strategy for establishing and fixing black difference, a tradition that included Joel Chandler Harris, George W. Cable, Thomas Nelson Page, Irwin Russell, and many others. The historical context in which this dialect literature arose suggests that concerns about voting, and in particular about the potential for minority voters to determine the outcome of elections, were significant factors behind the emergence of the genre.

Harris, for instance, published his first Uncle Remus sketch in the *Atlanta Constitution* on October 31, 1876 (Hemenway, "Introduction" 13), only a week before the disputed presidential election whose equally controversial resolution in the Compromise of 1877 ended Reconstruction in the South. The Reconstruction period was of course marked by the extension of the franchise to millions of formerly enslaved black men under the terms of the Fifteenth Amendment, even as Congress stripped the franchise from thousands of white men who had held leadership positions in the defeated Confederate government and military. A once-marginalized, subaltern population had suddenly acquired a political voice, while the dominant group was ignominiously muzzled, a state of affairs that led to considerable white anxiety about the meaning, purpose, and legitimacy of that new voice—of African American subjectivity and political agency. What did it portend for the South? Did it promise a new infusion of energy, creativity, and initiative into southern political and economic life? Did it threaten to "out-vote" the white elites and redefine the identity and direction of the region? In what accents would it ultimately "speak"?

As these questions not so subtly suggest, the black dialect sketches that emerged in the late 1870s and early 1880s offered white authors and readers a way to explore precisely such anxieties, by figuring the African American political voice as a speaking voice. Not only did this strategy bring a bodily immediacy, familiarity, and concreteness to a set of troubling new concerns about political representation and will, but it also introduced an explicitly normative dimension that served to discredit its object. Its exaggerated emphasis on the sounds of black speech, its hyperbolic materializations of voice, linked black language as a primary vehicle of black subjectivity to the

mutable, corruptible realm of the body—with its brute urges and irrational impulses—rather than to the loftier realms of mind, soul, and reason. Those more exalted realms were implicitly reserved for speakers of the grammatically correct, orthographically unmarked language typically assigned to white characters and narrators in the dialect sketches.[5] Guilty by association with the body, the black dialect voice could thus be safely dismissed—or at least severely discounted—as a political force to be reckoned with by postbellum whites. As John Edgar Wideman sums it up, "*Difference* in the dialect tradition clearly signaled *deficiency*" (60).

Nor did the political subtext of dialect end there. As Gavin Jones has argued, it could extend as far as the outright pathologization of the speaker. For many Gilded Age psychologists, verbal critics, and other students of what Jones, following nineteenth-century elocutionist Frank Fenno, calls "vocal culture" (70), "faulty speech" was held to be a "direct correlative of social and cultural disease" (64). This was no mere metaphor: "improper forms of speech were understood as *actual* diseases—both physical and mental—that had the power to infect" the nation (65). Defective utterances signaled defective minds and bodies (70). More than that—utterance *was* body, so that dialect speech could be thought of as "a 'physiognomy' that unconsciously revealed disorders within" (19). Some commentators took this emphasis on physiognomy more literally than others. A few, such as South Carolina's Ambrose Gonzalez, even flirted with what Geneva Smitherman terms "biological determinism" in the attempt to *derive* the idiosyncrasies of African American dialect from such ostensible peculiarities of black physiognomy as flat noses, thick lips, and clumsy tongues (Smitherman, *Talkin That Talk* 71–75).[6] By yoking African American expression to the body and the body to inferiority, disease, and difference, literary representations of black dialect helped reinforce the work of grandfather clauses, poll taxes, literacy tests, spectacle lynchings, Jim Crow laws, and other white-imposed obstacles to African American political participation in the postbellum South (North 22). It would fall to African American writers such as Charles Chesnutt, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and ultimately Zora Neale Hurston to rescue and reappropriate the black dialect voice for other literary projects and possibilities, to give it new cultural and ideological inflections.

This was not the first time in the region's history, of course, that the extension of the franchise triggered a profusion of dialect writing. In the introductory chapter, I discussed the emergence of southwestern humor writing as a literary response to Jacksonian-era extensions of the white franchise to unlanded and sometimes illiterate working-class men. Antebellum dialect writing, however, was for the most part a minor literature; though some southwestern humorists found a national readership for their regional sketches in the sporting newspapers and journals of the period, that readership re-

mained numerically modest and demographically narrow. By contrast, writes Jones, "Late nineteenth-century America was crazy about dialect literature. . . . New literary genres developed: the dialect poem, the dialect story, the dialect novel. Dubbed 'the cult of the vernacular,' this new movement was judged to be the most significant literary event of its generation" (1–2).

What accounts for this late-century fascination with the aural nuances of the American speaking voice and for the popularity of a literature devoted to the graphic rendition of those nuances? We could start with the significant common ground between dialect writing and literary realism, the dominant representational paradigm of the era. In this context, dialect literature functions as an extension of realism's technical and political program—the accurate portrayal of the phenomenal world, including specific regional communities, ethnic groups, class identities, and the distinctions among them—into the aural domain, as "the search for more radical and thorough depictions of sound" led realist writers "to widespread orthographic innovation" (Gavin Jones 4). Within that domain, the voice assumed a special place as the defining field and instrument of human sociality:

> [Period] writers believed that their new methods were ethically sound because they could represent the voices of people previously beyond formal literature by expanding the techniques of writing to include the prosodic qualities which generally differentiate the spoken from the written word. . . . At their most enthusiastic, dialect writers believed they could capture the extra-lexical expressive qualities of America's many different ways of talking. Words were described as going beyond the previous limits of language by embodying an entirely different level of meaning not previously approached by written representation. (Gavin Jones 44)

This emphasis on the "prosodic qualities" and "extra-lexical" dimensions of speech bears noting here. Dialect writers knew well that spoken language encompasses much more than mere words. Their "technical efforts to make voices visible on the printed page" (39) might be more precisely understood as efforts to make those voices *audible* rather than simply *legible* or *verbal*. To do justice to those voices meant materializing their sound, capturing the body's inevitable but elusive traces, its Barthesian "grain," *in* the voice.

I find it fascinating and suggestive that the resurgence of dialect representation charted by Jones and others coincides almost exactly with the invention of the phonograph in 1877 and the new era of mechanical sound recording it inaugurated. The relationship between the rise of phonography and a newly reenergized cult of the vernacular remains a largely undeveloped theme in scholarly accounts of dialect writing *and* of the period Lisa Gitelman has dubbed "the Edison era," although Gitelman observes that "[p]rint culture and nonprint media evolve in mutual inextricability" in any given cultural moment (*Scripts* 13). Her work permits the conclusion that the strange

talk of dialect literature and the equally strange work of Edison's talking machine were entangled in just this way.

From our historical perspective on the phonograph as one of the twentieth century's most popular forms of amusement, it is easy to forget that Edison originally envisioned his invention as a business device "for the conversion of aural experience into *records*," and "the aural experience he had foremost in mind was clearly speech" (Gitelman, *Scripts* 63). Indeed, Edison's U.S. patent application for the phonograph characterized the device as a "Speaking Machine" (97). Imagined this way, as a kind of dictaphone before the fact, the machine represents an extension and perfection of existing strategies within print culture that sought to capture the sounds of speech. Gitelman argues that Edison's "primary model" for phonography was neither the telephone nor the telegraph but the contemporary manual discourse of shorthand (15). Edison even got the name for his new machine from a mid-century shorthand advocate, who coined the term "phonography" (sound-writing) as a loose synonym for "stenography" (24). The etymological emphasis on the *writing* of sound directly evokes the phonograph's links to contemporary print culture, as does its original mechanical configuration, in which the stylus traced sound vibrations not (as later) onto wax or shellac but onto a rectangular sheet of tinfoil wrapped around a rotating cylinder. As Gitelman suggests, such sheets must have inspired reflection on phonography as a strange new form of "printedness" among the lucky audience members who were allowed to take small pieces of the tinfoil home from early phonograph demonstrations ("Souvenir Foils" 158). The phonograph's direct inscriptions of sound thus took their place alongside contemporary transcriptions of speech by stenographers, linguists, and the like as efforts "to perfect a technology for linguistic representation" (*Scripts* 24). All of these strategies, Gitelman argues, whether manual or mechanical, fall within a broader discursive framework, grounded in print culture but not ultimately limited to it, which she calls "'speaking' on paper" ("Souvenir Foils" 158). This framework, which helped establish the conditions of possibility for mechanical sound recording and reproduction, included not only shorthand manuals, philological studies, and the simplified spelling movement but also, Gitelman states explicitly, "the widespread publishing of dialect and regional literatures" (158). Thus, the dialect movement's experiments with sound-writing formed part of the conceptual horizon against which Edison understood the meaning and potential uses of his new machine.

But phonography, I want to suggest, exerted a reciprocal influence on dialect representation and other forms of phonetic writing. For despite its continuities of purpose with the print culture of aural experience, it also effected a decisive methodological break with the discourse network in which that print tradition developed and flourished. "Discourse network" is media the-

orist Friedrich Kittler's term for the nexus of "technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data" (*Discourse Networks* 369).[7] "Around 1800" (Kittler's stock phrase for roughly the first half of the nineteenth century), that network revolved around writing, the dominant information storage medium of the period. We already met Kittler in chapter 1, where he offered an account of the typewriter as a powerful and widely distributed new information storage technology that brought the act of writing fully into the machine age and in so doing introduced new disturbances and discontinuities into the neurophysiological feedback loop linking mind, eye, hand, and letter. As Kittler details, the typewriter was accompanied historically by other late-century technologies that allowed sensory data—flows of acoustical and optical information—to be recorded and stored directly, without the intervention of written symbols or notation systems. One of these new media formations was the phonograph, which played a leading role in inaugurating what Kittler calls the discourse network of 1900. He repeatedly emphasizes the revolutionary impact of this new machine: by dispensing with symbolization entirely, it gave its users access not to symbolic representations of speech but to "[t]he real of speaking" (246), "register[ing] real sounds rather than translating them into phonetic equivalents as an alphabet does" (232). This new phonographic reality was closely associated with the materiality of the speaking, sounding body, capturing that body in its unsymbolizable immediacy, including the "physiology of the voice"; the "heinous waste material" of grunts and sighs, breathiness or nasality, pitch, timbre, and grain (246). These, of course, are precisely the "extra-lexical" dimensions of oral expression that dialect writers aspired to reproduce orthographically. On one hand, phonography revealed the futility of such aspirations, exposing the limits—indeed, the obsolescence—of writing as a sound storage technology. This is what Gitelman means in observing that even as they visually evoked the written page, the tinfoil souvenirs of phonography "disparaged print by implication and helped to suggest the latter's *in*authenticity as a means of recording and presentation," the ugly fact that "'[s]peaking' on paper offered no actual sounds of speech" ("Souvenir Foils" 168). The "physiological data" of such sounds proved irreducible, even recalcitrant, to the conventions of script or print (Kittler, *Discourse Networks* 236). But on the other hand, even as it seemingly eclipsed orthographically based systems of sound-writing, the talking machine also helped foster a more vivid attentiveness to the aural environment, including the speaking voice, and helped set new benchmarks for fidelity of sound reproduction. In this sense, phonography may have helped fuel the explosion of dialect literature in the Gilded Age and the Edison era by whetting popular interest in the sounds of speech and spurring dialect writers and other devotees of speaking on paper to higher standards of accuracy and detail for their craft.

Yet phonography's impact was also troubling in many ways: "the more Edison 'domesticated' his invention," writes Portia Dadley, "the stranger it became" (85). Even as it reproduced voices thick with the materiality and "stochastic disorder of bodies" (Suárez 9), the phonograph severed these voices from their human speakers, introducing new distances and uncertainties into the experience of audition, not unlike the ones typewriting had introduced into the production and visual consumption of written signs. As Sara Danius explains, phonographs "strip sound not only of its spatial source but also of its temporal origin" (17), leaving recorded voices susceptible to manipulations that exceed or elude the intentions of the speaking subjects that initially produced them. Douglas Kahn makes a similar point more forcefully, evoking the new anxieties produced by modern sound media: "phonography kept one's voice and words together but wrenched the voice from the throat and out of time" (*Noise* 9). "A voice without a face," Dave Laing calls this new technological phenomenon. And for Charles Grivel, the machine provokes a gnomic postulate—"The phonograph emphasizes the self in the lack of subject" (35)—which he elaborates in an allegorical scenario of phonographic vertigo and disillusionment: "I see before me a machine that speaks [to] me. . . . When it speaks to me, it also represents to me, outside of me and without me, the absence of subject: it repeats me without my being there. . . . I am no longer characterized, I am dispossessed of my character, I am missing the sign of truth: voice, the soul. Who will not say that I have been dissolved?" (52).[8] In short-circuiting the conceptual relay linking voice, consciousness, interiority, self-presence, and truth, the phonograph undermines classical logocentric models of subjectivity and epistemology, performing what Kahn calls "a machine-critique of Western metaphysics a century before Derrida's critique of Husserl" ("Death" 93; see also Kahn, *Noise* 8; Danius 195). "Ever since the invention of the phonograph," observes Kittler, "there has been writing without a subject" (*Gramophone* 44).[9]

Indeed, the history, phenomenology, and literature of early phonography draws heavily on a language of lack, loss, and violent cleavage: dispossession, dissolution, destabilization, displacement, disruption, decentering, division, detachment, dissociation, dis-organ-ization.[10] And not least of all, disembodiment. By cutting the voice loose from a visible speaking body, locatable in space and time, the phonograph unleashed a storm of new sensations and possibilities that seemed to defy ordinary rational explanation. We can start with the fact, noted by Edison himself, that his invention could be used to record the last words of the dying or more generally to preserve the voices of persons no longer living. Phonography, then, approached the status of magic in its ability to reanimate the dead (Kahn, "Introduction" 6). Yet as Mladen Dolar points out, *any* voice, once "separated from its body, evokes the voice of the dead" (65): even the voices of still-living speakers underwent pro-

found defamiliarization in the new medium, transported into a metaphysical limbo. Indeed, at the advent of phonography, bodiless voices and sourceless sounds were still associated in the popular imagination with the workings of the supernatural, the hallucinations of mental illness, or the trickery of ventriloquism; contemporaries often reached for such examples of subjectivity out of place in their attempts to make sense of the new device. The invisible voices and sounds with which the phonograph filled the air invited comparison with the "invisibles" of nineteenth-century spiritualism: the spectral presences of the departed that we encountered in chapter 1.[11] Occultists evinced interest in the machine even as its inventor himself drifted toward occultism, as a would-be authority on the hereafter—an irony noted with some amusement by Kahn.[12] An early demonstration in Paris brought angry accusations from one witness who was certain that the audience was being fooled by a ventriloquist (Kahn, "Death" 92). The impact of the new technology could be overwhelming, even literally maddening: audience members are reported to have fainted at an 1888 demonstration in Washington, D.C., and to have characterized the sounds coming from the machine as diabolical (Laing 4).[13] Finally, Laing suggests that in their anxious need to assign the free-floating voices of phonography to a visible source, early users came to focus the "scopic drive" on the machine itself (8), in a process most famously illustrated by the dog Nipper, who stares curiously into a gramophone horn in *His Master's Voice*, the turn-of-the-century Francis Barraud painting that supplied the London Gramophone Company and the U.S.-based Victor Talking Machine Company with one of the most valuable corporate trademarks of the modern era.[14] Such fetishizations of sound technology suggest a weird reshuffling of the properties of subjectivity "in the extension of agency to inert matter" just when human beings were losing control over their own utterances and ceding agency to machines (Suárez 121). In all of these ways, phonography contributed to the emergence of a technological uncanniness that attests to the gaps and distortions that new sound media introduced into liberal models of selfhood, paving the way for the unstable, "split" subjectivities of interwar cultural modernism.

The Cauldron of Sound

On April 18, 1934, just weeks before the publication of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Hurston wrote a long, newsy letter to her friend Eslanda Robeson. She reported the sale of her second book, *Mules and Men*, to Lippincott and paused to talk shop with Robeson, who was at the time studying anthropology at the London School of Economics and University College (C. Kaplan 299n2). Her summer plans, she wrote, included a field project collecting "Negro songs" for the Library of Congress with "some one from the Uni. of

Texas" (300). That someone turned out to be Alan Lomax, the son of prominent folklorist John Lomax (who had recently recorded Leadbelly in Louisiana) and an up-and-coming collector of folklore in his own right. The proposed expedition, which was postponed until the summer of 1935 for reasons that remain unclear but may have involved the health of John Lomax (see 333), was to make use of a recording phonograph to document the performances of Hurston's informants. Thus, Hurston and Lomax were planning to tap into an already established tradition of phonography as an anthropological and linguistic research tool (see, for instance, Brady; Pietz 268–270; Radick). What Lomax eventually brought to Florida was a "new, sensitive recording machine" that used aluminum discs as blanks (C. Kaplan 354). This was cutting-edge technology; according to Erika Brady, disc recorders had made their debut in anthropological fieldwork only a few years before (26). Hurston pronounced Lomax "a good operator" of the device (C. Kaplan 353); Lomax in turn would characterize Hurston as "probably the best informed person today on Western Negro folklore" (qtd. in Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston* 212). As Hurston reported to Ruth Benedict, the focus of the collecting trip expanded beyond songs, as initially planned, to include sermons, prayers, children's chants and games, "woofing," and various forms of instrumental music including drumming (C. Kaplan 353–354). This inventory coincides to a remarkable degree with the features of southern black expressive culture that Hurston had recently dramatized in fictional form in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*.

The links between Hurston's work as a folklorist and her first novel have been well documented by scholars such as Robert Hemenway, John Lowe, and especially Eric Sundquist, whose account of the novel's conceptual debts to the anthropological insights developed in essays like "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," "Characteristics of Negro Expression," "The Sanctified Church," and "High John de Conquer" remains one of the high-water marks of Hurston criticism. Hurston had already gathered the material for her planned collection on "Negro Folk-Tales from the Gulf States" before writing *Jonah's*, but her literary matron Charlotte Osgood Mason had been reluctant to authorize the release of this material for publication. It has been suggested that Hurston may have seen Lippincott's invitation to submit a novel as an opportunity to disseminate some of the fruits of her anthropological labors in a fictional context, and Hemenway faults the novel for its excessive reliance on this anthropological material, which he sees as ultimately detracting from the literary integrity of the book. "*Jonah's Gourd Vine*," he writes, "cannot be properly represented by a plot outline or discussion of character development. The novel is less a narrative than a series of linguistic moments representing the folklore of the black South" (*Zora Neale Hurston* 192).

I want to suggest that the novel's account of black life in the region is mediated not only by anthropology, however, but additionally and crucially by phonography.[15] As early as 1927, on her first extended foray into the field under the direction of Franz Boas, Hurston reported that Carter Woodson of the NAACP had offered to fund the purchase of "a recording machine" to assist her efforts if Boas could locate one for under a hundred dollars (C. Kaplan 98). As we have seen, the phonograph was on her mind again in 1934–1935, the period that saw the publication of her first books of fiction and folklore. In her collecting trips around the South, she would have seen and heard phonographs in black homes and gathering places, and many of these phonographs would doubtless have been playing "race records" that featured some of the same folk forms, such as sermons and blues, that she was documenting in her fieldwork (Sundquist, *Hammers* 79). It seems not only reasonable but nearly inevitable, then, that the phonograph would have exerted an informing influence on Hurston's imagination as she composed *Jonah's*, or that, as Sundquist suggests, "the competition between printed and aural forms of transmission" would have "entered into her aesthetic as well" (80). That aesthetic is powerfully attuned to the ear: to improvise on Hemenway, we could fairly describe *Jonah's* as a series of *acoustic* moments that cumulatively dramatize African American folk experience in its social, cultural, spiritual, and environmental aspects as what the novel's narrator calls a "cauldron of sound" (*Jonah's* 55).

A case can be made for the phonograph as a formative factor behind this aurally and vocally oriented aesthetic of black culture. Beyond simply recording African American cultural artifacts for the archive, the machine played a more active part in shaping contemporary academic, artistic, and popular conceptions of black cultural distinctiveness and of what counts as black "culture" in the first place. As Erika Brady explains, many turn-of-the-century folklorists and ethnographers were influenced by Romantic, Herderian notions of "language and music as keys to cultural character" (12). Phonograph technology powerfully reinforced this understanding of discrete aural events as paradigmatic expressive texts, "the essential units of a community's traditional culture" (88): "The use of the phonograph automatically framed information as a presentation or performance, something set aside and special: brief, powerful, and permanent. As such it was best suited to record materials that were naturally and intrinsically 'performances,' formulaically defined and set off in the normal course of events from the usual flow of social expression—that is, songs, religious ceremonies, and narratives" (70). "[I]t was precisely these expressive forms," Brady continues, "that were of particular interest to ethnologists of the Boasian tribe," a tribe that of course numbered Hurston among its members. Not coincidentally, Boas

was an early, influential proponent of the use of the phonograph to collect field data (see Brady 65–67); many of his students and colleagues, including Hurston, proved to be pioneers in applying the new technology in the field.

In the specific case of African American performances such as sermons, blues, or folktales—all of which feature prominently in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*'s representations of black culture—the phonograph also contributed to new standards of accuracy in the recording and preservation of aural materials, whether for the archive or for popular consumption. Ann Douglas has observed, for instance, that musical notation systems in the early twentieth century were "dominated by piano reductions of choral and instrumental music, and white composers and performers naturally tended to think of notation in terms of the piano's resources" (421). So, for the most part, did the largely white fieldworkers who studied black expressive culture at this time. "American blacks," however, "did their musical thinking differently. Like their African ancestors, they started with the resources of the voice and the body's rhythmic possibilities, resources more complex and varied than the piano could offer." Written transcriptions of black musical performance suffered accordingly. And African American spoken language, "itself the source of the slides and slurs and microtones of blues singing and jazz instrumentation, was full of the same untranscribable tonalities and idiosyncratic phrasing. Books could no more accurately transcribe Black English than piano sheets music could black music" (425). With the advent of "post-print media" such as the phonograph and radio, however, "African Americans could now be heard without the distortions of an alien form of transmission." They could be heard, and imitated, in this new way not only by artists, anthropologists, and American consumers, but by other members of their own community, for whom records and radio often functioned as vital forms of cultural transmission—as evidenced, for instance, by blues musicians who, in interviews and memoirs, have acknowledged learning performance styles and other aspects of the tradition from recordings on jukeboxes or in the home.[16] The new media, Douglas concludes, "were to black speech and music what the book and piano were to white speech and music" (425–426).[17] This serendipitous encounter between technology and culture, media form and content, can already be glimpsed in early trade publications for the phonograph industry that extolled black singing voices as particularly suited to the acoustic specifications of the new medium (see T. Brooks 30).[18] What this all suggests is that the phonograph, as both a field instrument and an entertainment device, helped predispose Hurston to foreground aural elements, and especially the voice, in the account of black culture she was developing in her folklore and fiction writings of the thirties.

Jonah's Gourd Vine is entirely consistent with Houston A. Baker Jr.'s influential observations on "sounding" and the manipulation of "bizarre pho-

nic legacies" as fundamental elements of a distinctly African American vernacular modernism (*Modernism* xvi, 24). Far less commented on, however, is the novel's place in a wider, more international landscape of modernism characterized by what Melba Cuddy-Keane calls a "new aurality," a "new acoustical perception" (82) shaped by contemporary media forms like the phonograph that literally "*produced* our current understanding of sound" (70). Among the hallmarks of this new sensibility are "a more diversified and inclusive" use of sound as aesthetic material (94); an emphasis on "the broad diffusion of sounds in space" (82); close attention to sonic textures; and "the nonhierarchal [*sic*] mixing of voices and noises—or noises treated as voices" (90).[19] None of these stylistic features would seem unfamiliar to a reader of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. In a more recent and equally ingenious essay, Juan Suárez reads T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land* as "essentially a D.J. session that treats the literary tradition as a sound archive to be manipulated by means of gramophone technology" (7); "prerecorded sound," he argues, "is the condition of possibility for the entire work" (125). *The Waste Land* mimics phonography in aspiring to a "total inclusiveness" of sound reproduction that captures foreground and background elements with equal fidelity (131). The poem even anticipates contemporary sampling techniques in gathering snatches of spoken utterances and other snippets of sound into an aural pastiche. *Jonah's* does something very similar with the expressive traditions and aural traces of African American culture. In this way, the methodology of the new modernism studies provides ear-opening new paradigms for the analysis of Hurston's most sound-saturated text.

Jonah's Gourd Vine begins and ends with lively evocations of aurality. The first reported action in the text is a sound event, God "grumbling his thunder" in the sky above an Alabama farmstead (1). And the narrative concludes with a sound portrait of protagonist John Pearson's funeral, where "the preacher preache[s] a barbaric requiem poem" (201) and "the drumming of the feet" of the mourners calls up "the ancient drum" O-go-doe, "the voice of death," to end the ceremony (and the book) "in rhythm" (202). In between, the novel records a world pulsing with sound and documents the impact of these sounds on the life and career of Pearson, a man who becomes in a most literal way the voice of his people.

As if to recall the aural landscape of childhood, the phonography of the opening chapter is dominated by the voices of John's parents, Amy and Ned Crittenden. As the couple engages in heated debate over the challenges of sharecropping, the fate of the African American community in the generation following Emancipation, and John's status within the family (as the light-skinned stepson whom Ned resents because of his mixed racial ancestry), narrative commentary recedes almost entirely before the driving intensity of the voices, and the text approaches the sheer mimetic immediacy of

sound recording, not even pausing to identify the speakers, who must supply all such cues themselves (see, for instance, 5–6). Numerous other scenes stress the musicality and sound play of African American vocal culture and the centrality of vocal performance to black cultural distinctiveness (see, for example, 15, 29, 35, 56, 108). In this way the text reminds us of the materiality as well as the thematic importance of the black speaking voice.

New sounds, both human and environmental, beckon to sixteen-year-old John from the big world beyond the Crittenden farm. On the night he leaves home, "singing a new song and stomping the beats," he is accompanied by the "lyric crescendo" of a "tenor-singing hound dog," the "creep creep creep" of unseen creatures moving through the woods, and the "drums of the Creek" as it "thunder[s] among its rocks and whirl[s] on down" (12). Little wonder that John "breathe[s] lustily" at the prospect of his new life, when all of nature seems to breathe and voice itself in concert with him. The following morning, he is greeted by "a strange noise" (13), the "shouting and laughing" of children enjoying recess at the local schoolhouse, which will prove to be an important site in John's growth and development as a character. It is where he learns to read, write, and cipher, skills that open doors for him around Alf Pearson's plantation and beyond, and it is of course where he meets Lucy, the brightest student at the school. If it seems odd that the novel would introduce the theme of literacy, one of the defining motifs of African American personal narrative from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, by means of an aural event—the sounds of horseplay in a schoolyard—it is typical of *Jonah's Gourd Vine* to announce new characters and phenomena in just this way. On more than one occasion, John will succumb to sexual temptation at the hands of young women whose presence is first signaled aurally: "a stealthy small sound" behind a bush during a game of hide-and-seek leads John to Phrony, a "womanish fourteen-year-old" who takes the boy's mind off his new sweetheart, Lucy (22); "a soft whisper from around the corner of the house," followed by a "voice retreat[ing] into the shoulder-high cotton," announces Mehaley, another rival for the affection properly due Lucy (51); and "gay giggling" is the calling card of Ora Patton, the last of John's long string of infidelities (195).

Nor is the schoolhouse the only significant African American cultural resource to be heralded by sound. On his first foray into the small town of Notasulga, John is startled by "a great rumbling at hand" that turns out to be a locomotive "shickalack[ing]" into the station (15). John has been idly whistling to himself, a gesture that the mesmerizing new machine reciprocates with interest: "John stared at the panting monster for a terrified moment, then prepared to bolt. . . . Tried to look unconcerned, but the great eye beneath the cloud-breathing smoke-stack glared and threatened. The engine's very sides seemed to expand and contract like a fiery-lunged monster. The

engineer leaning out of his window saw the fright in John's face and blew a sharp blast on his whistle and John started violently in spite of himself. The crowd roared" (15–16). John acknowledges the visual beauty and dazzle of the locomotive as well as its more menacing aspect: "hit sho look frightenin' . . . [b]ut hits uh pretty thing too" (16). But as the train "rattle[s] on off" and "the noise of its going" recedes, he comes back to its exciting new sounds:

> "Ah lakted dat. It say something but Ah ain't heered it 'nough tuh tell whut it say yit. You know whut it say?"
>
> "It don't say nothin'. It jes' make uh powerful racket, dass all."
>
> "Naw, it say some words too. Ahm comin' heah plenty mo' times and den Ah tell yuh whut it say." (16)

As others have pointed out, what the train might have been saying to John—and what it arguably does say to him, once he becomes culturally and experientially equipped to hear it—is that railroads were a crucial source of mobility, and thus a crucial symbol of freedom, for African Americans during the aftermath of Emancipation and Jubilee. Or that the railroad meant economic opportunity for many black southerners seeking alternatives to agricultural labor and its elements of neoslavery. Or that the sounds of the railroad infiltrated the rhythms, energies, and subject matter of African American expressive forms like the blues. Or that railroads were emerging, right around the time of John's first fateful encounter with the fiery-lunged monster, as symbolically freighted sites of cultural contestation, with the rise of Jim Crow laws that segregated common carriers.[20] I will return to some of these issues later. For now it is enough to note that the locomotive takes its place alongside the schoolhouse, the voices of ex-slaves like Ned and Amy, and the night sounds of the rural countryside as part of the novel's sound archive of black cultural tradition. What Suárez claims T. S. Eliot is doing with extracts from the English poetic tradition in *The Waste Land*—phonographically manipulating them as sound samples—Hurston is doing with fundamental elements of African American history and expressivity.

This technique is even more explicit at another of the novel's important early sound scenes, a barbecue thrown by Judge Pearson to celebrate the ginning of the cotton crop (28–32). As darkness descends, an anonymous voice signals the intent of the field hands to construct a specifically African American soundscape: "Hey you, dere, us ain't no white folks! Put down dat fiddle! Us don't want no fiddles, neither no guitars, neither no banjoes. Less clap!" (29). The nighttime truly is the right time for the creation and celebration of culturally resonant sounds. The narrative ranges widely and rapidly across the action to record a diverse collection of aural materials. There is, for example, the human body as a percussion device—or more precisely as a

percussion ensemble smuggled into the New World from the ancestral homeland:

> They called for the instrument that they had brought to America in their skins—the drum—and they played upon it. With their hands they played upon the little dance drums of Africa. The drums of kid-skin. With their feet they stomped it, and the voice of Kata-Kumba, the great drum, lifted itself within them and they heard it. . . . The drum with the man skin that is dressed with human blood, that is beaten with a human shin-bone and speaks to gods as a man and to men as a God. . . . Hollow hand-clapping for the bass notes. Heel and toe stomping for the little one. . . . Double clapping— . . . Too hot for words. Fiery drum clapping.[21] (29–31)

In a move that evokes the talking drums of Africa (Sundquist, *Hammers* 70–71), this entire feast of rhythm, struck from the hands, feet, and flesh of the participants, is referred to in the singular as a "voice." Amy Crittenden, for one, "offer[s] her body" to it (30). It is difficult to imagine a better illustration of voice as a material, bodily phenomenon for Hurston.

The barbecue scene also features the shouted figures that guide the movements of the dancers: "Couples tuh yo' places lak hawse tuh de traces"; "Sixteen hands up!"; "Circle four" (31). And then there are the snatches and fragments of rhyme and song strewn liberally across the page:

> Ole cow died in Tennessee
> Send her jawbone back to me
> Jawbone walk, Jawbone talk
> Jawbone eat wid uh knife and fork. (30)

> Ole Ant Dinah behind de pine
> One eye out and de other one blind
> Ain't Ah right? Yeah! Yeah! (30)

Poor visually impaired Dinah might not even mourn her handicap were her world as sonically rich and alive as this one. What Suárez would call the textual mechanics of the episode stores trenchant cultural practices and artifacts and thereby accesses cultural tradition *as* aural information. And as each text compiles an archive, it also preserves a canon. Eliot had his Shakespeare and Spenser, Arthurian legends and bits of Petronius. Hurston has Dinah and the talking Jawbone—a figure that in retrospect seems no afterthought, given the way it crystallizes the complex acoustic logic of this marvelous scene.

Certainly any aural catalog of the African American South would be incomplete without the sounds of the black church. Well before John moves his family to central Florida and becomes a Baptist minister, the text permits us to listen in on a service at Macedony Baptist Church in Alabama, where John and Lucy sing in the choir. Macedony's preacher delivers a two-hour sermon

in which "his voice beat about the ears of the people" while "the 'Amen's' rocked and rolled back to the pulpit" from the congregation in waves of sound (54). Yet the sermon itself goes undepicted, a curious omission in such a sound-soaked novel. Perhaps Hurston wanted to avoid stealing any thunder from John's performances to come in the pulpit, for the narrative is far more preoccupied with the music that accompanies the service. Even here, however, the emphasis lies less on the sweet strains of sacred song or the uplifting lyrical content of the hymns than on the phonic matter of vocal music itself, as the choir members struggle comically to get the proper pitch. The result is something like the musical equivalent of dialect writing. Lucy's brother Bud Potts, the choir director, tries to wrest a semblance of order out of the chaos:

> "Basses—duh-h-h-h. Y'all got it? Altos—fah-h-h—Trebles—me-e-e-e—. Pay 'tension dere, Lucy!"
>
> Satisfied in the matter of the pitch, Bud took a full breath and broke out through his nose—"Duh, duh, duh, duh! Dole la fee so lah so fee." The altos were right behind the basses and fighting in haughty jerks for sound supremacy—"fah! fah! me! sol! fah-so-la-so-lah-so-fah!" The trebles pitched out in full, Ory behind the pack and keened furiously to make up for lost time, "—me, me, ray, do! Me-fah-lah-so-lah-so-fah! Oh me, me, me,—"
>
> It was a hard race and hotly contended at the top of the lungs all the way. (53)

This amounts to a primer in the extralexical elements of the singing voice. And the physical elements—the work of the nose (in Bud's head singing), the lungs, the larynx, even the head: "John beat the bass notes by a vigorous side-to-side motion of his head and everybody in the audience thought they heard him singing them." Such music is wrung from the body as strenuously and passionately as the drum rhythms at the barbecue. Moreover, as the different sections of the choir, identified by their respective pitch symbols, jostle and overlap in their bid for "supremacy" within the sound field, we become aware of the serial and synchronic interplay among the notes. As the passage continues, note how creatively Hurston draws on figurative language to locate sounds and to evoke their relations in space: "The trebles won because while altos, basses, and even other trebles forgot their notes in confusion and fell by the wayside, Lucy never missed a note. Bud growled away in the bass but Lucy treed him and held him growling in discomfiture out upon a limb until the end of the piece cut him down." High and low, foreground and background, the lateral movement on a tree limb, or even the side-to-side action of John's head as he slings out his notes—sound here fills and delineates the contours of the church space in all three dimensions. What this suggests is that the narrative perspective in this brief scene serves primarily to position the reader in an aural, not a visual field. The appeal is not to a traditional point of view or focalizer but to the figure Cuddy-Keane christens the

auscultator, "the person doing the listening" within the narrative framework (71). According to Cuddy-Keane, the advent of modern sound technologies spurred artistic awareness of the auscultator and promoted experimentation with "the aural placement of the listener" in narrative art. That is exactly what Hurston is doing in her phonographic novel: cultivating the reader as a point of hearing and exploiting the possibilities this gives rise to.

Perhaps the novel's most impressive feat of sound engineering lies in condensing an entire historical era into a single representative vocal performance, a monologue that bears the telltale signs of phonographic reproduction. John Pearson's parents were born in slavery, he comes of age in the 1880s, and as a historical figure he serves as a kind of Moses, leading his people toward the promised land of U.S. modernity without ever quite crossing that particular Jordan himself. Late in the novel, the coming of World War I and the emergence of new economic opportunities in the North begin to break the grip of the land on John's rural black parishioners. Church attendance dwindles as they drift away; the Great Migration is on. The narrator sets the stage for this historical watershed: "black men's feet learned roads. . . . The daybreak found them gone. The wind said North. Trains said North. The tides and tongues said North, and men moved like the great herds before the glaciers" (147–148). Suddenly, a lone speaking voice erupts into the narrative, anonymous and irrepressible, like nothing we have heard before in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*: "Gen'l Pushin', Gen'l Punishin', Gen'l Perchin', Gen'l Pershin'. War risk, war bread, insurance, Camp dis-and-dat. Is you heard any news? Dead? Lawd a mussy! Sho hope mah boy come thew aw-right. De black man ain't got no voice but soon ez war come who de first man dey shove in front? De nigger! Ain't it de truth?" (148). The speaker—surely his own best evidence that not all black men lack a voice—goes on in this vein for over four hundred words in what is, except for Pearson's farewell sermon to his church, the longest uninterrupted speech in the text. He voices admiration for Teddy Roosevelt. Du Bois is compared unfavorably with Booker T. Washington. Black men are credited with inventing electricity and the railroad. And the speaker flashes the cosmopolitan credentials he has earned in the war:

> Yeah men, parlez vous, man, don't come bookooin' 'round heah, yuh liable tuh git hurt. Ah could uh married one uh dem French women but shucks, gimme uh brown skin eve'y time. Blacker de berry sweeter de juice. Come tuh mah pick, gimme uh good black gal. De wine wuz sour, and Ah says parlez vous, hell! You gimme mah right change! Comme telly vous. Nar, Ah ain't goin' back tuh no farm no mo'. Ah don't mean tuh say, "Git up" tuh nary 'nother mule lessen he's setting down in mah lap. God made de world but he never made no hog outa me tuh go 'round rootin' it up. Done done too much bookoo plowing already! Woman quick gimme mah sumpin t'eat. Toot sweet. (148–149)

This is nothing less than the soundtrack to a generation of younger African Americans marching inexorably into modernity. It hangs, strangely out of place, in the textual space, like a final ghostly legacy from one of the departed migrants, before being joined briefly by even more evanescent wisps of unattributed dialogue:

> "George, haven't you got some relatives and friends down South who'd like to get a job?"
>
> "Yes, suh."
>
> "Write 'em to come." (149)

This is precisely the sort of sonic detritus that characterizes the new media technologies and the aural landscape of modernism. As Suárez explains, "Radios, telephones, and gramophones multiplied exponentially the number of utterances floating through the air, contributing to the increased momentum of contemporary life. Their endless murmur was the sonic background of the second industrial revolution" (128). These are the murmurs that drift in and out of *The Waste Land*—"Goodnight ladies, goodnight"; "Hurry up please it's time"—and into Hurston's narrative as well. The migration monologue displays all the hallmarks of what Suárez calls the "unbound" language generated by mechanical sound reproduction, language stripped of its primary semantic content and reduced to "nonsense, wordplay, unconscious rhythms and rhymes, strings of association, snatches of conversation caught on the run, glossolalia" (129). Read out loud, the entire performance comes in at around two and a half minutes, just the right length for preservation (and playback) on the phonographic discs of the era.

My focus to this point on the phonographic sensibility of the novel in general has come at the expense of the even more refined version of this sensibility at work in its protagonist. Suárez writes of pop modernists that "they fashioned themselves after recording-receiving devices," "ears wide open to the world's unsuppressible cacophony" (129). "Rather than create," these writers "took dictation."[22] Hurston fashions her hero in much the same way. The more John Pearson approximates (or appropriates) the features of recording and playback technology, the more success and authority he enjoys: as a spellbinding minister who can bring converts to religion "under the sound of his voice" alone (Hurston, *Jonah's* 89), as a leader in his community who even serves a term as mayor of Eatonville, Florida (113–114), and as the Afro-diasporic cultural figure Roger Abrahams calls the man-of-words, for whom "voice is regarded as the essence of one's public self" (*Man-of-Words* 126). At the height of his influence, John confides to his wife, "De words dat sets de church on fire comes tuh me jus' so. Ah reckon de angels must tell 'em to me" (Hurston, *Jonah's* 112). But the novel suggests that John is being dis-

ingenuous, that the words, sounds, and images that animate his expressive performances ultimately come not from on high but from deep down in his vernacular environment—from the school, the work camp, the church, and the railroad station, from friends and coworkers, kin and strangers. He is blessed with a superb ear, an elephant's memory for voices and sounds, and a gift for mimicry that allows him to play back what he hears on demand. This makes him an ideal storage and retrieval device for the sounds and performance styles of black life, or what Kittler might call the "real" of African American speaking. Pearson doesn't produce that expressive real as much as *re*produce it—a phonograph with a man skin.

That powerful voice did not emerge fully formed, however. As a poor boy from the wrong side of the creek, browbeaten and shouted down by his stepfather, John initially lacks confidence in his expressive abilities. Alone with Lucy for the first time, he fumbles for words, and it is she who assures him that "you got uh good voice for speakin'" (32). Indeed, the quick-witted, articulate girl clearly belongs among the "angels" who provide John with his words. Along with his mother, she is the most conspicuous source for the folk rhymes that quickly make their way into his verbal repertoire. She also deserves credit twice over for John's introduction to the art of public speaking. Hoping to "make her gasp and do him 'reverence'" (33), he practices "imaginary speeches . . . full of big words," but in doing so, he is also emulating her example, since Lucy is the most accomplished orator at school: "She kin speak de longest pieces and never miss uh word and say 'em faster dan anybody Ah ever seed" (36–37). It is the chance to hear Lucy sing in the choir that draws John to church for the first time, and once again it falls to someone else, John's friend Charlie, to point out that John himself should be a natural for the choir, "wid all dat ches' you got" (27). It does not seem to have occurred to John that he might have talent as a voice.

The church figures prominently in John's apprenticeship in phonography for two reasons. Certainly, the performances he hears from the pulpit and the choir box give him material to add to his growing repertoire of cultural sounds. John, it turns out, has a special gift for "marking" preachers: on one occasion, he returns to a work camp after a church service and performs the entire sermon all over again, "so accurately that the crowd hung half-way between laughter and awe" (107).[23] (Yet again it is up to a comrade, not John himself, to note that John would make a good preacher.) But the church is an important resource for another reason: the way it brings out the acoustic properties of John's voice. As he prays aloud one morning at Macedony, "the empty house threw back his resonant tones like a guitar box" (52). This is the first time in the narrative that John seems to notice the power and potential of his own voice as an instrument, although it has to leave his body and return to him from the outside, discorporated and "deboned" in the manner

of mechanically reproduced sound.[24] "Dat sho sound good," he thinks. "If mah voice sound *dat* good de first time Ah ever prayed in de church house, it sho won't be de las'." The church architecture here functions as a kind of loudspeaker, the equivalent of what Grivel terms "the phonograph's horned mouth." It provides amplification for a voice still coming into its own, still acquiring cultural competence. But there is more. Words spoken in church carry communal authority. They acquire weight and, in multiple senses, volume. What John senses, then, is that the amplification the church offers his voice is not merely acoustic or structural. It is social as well. Indeed, the reverberant tones of his voice will soon find a communal correlative in the call-and-response dynamic that energizes his preaching style.[25] From this scene forward John seems destined for the pulpit.

But first, two related experiences introduce him to a new set of sounds that prove crucial in the development of his mature preaching style. While still courting Lucy, he is hired to cut railroad crossties in the bottomlands of the Alabama River. He finds the work exhilarating, especially the way the physical energies of manual labor find collective vocal expression on the work crew: "He found that he liked the rhythmic swing, the chant 'Cuttin' timber!' with the up stroke of the axe. Then the swift, sure descent, 'Hanh!' Up again, 'Cuttin' ties! Hanh.' All day long, 'Cuttin' timber! Hanh! Cuttin' ties, hanh!'" (60). Several years later, as he scouts out a new homeplace for his family in Florida, he joins a lining crew laying down a railroad spur in a nearby town. Once again, the "strain, sweat and rhythm" (105) of gang labor produce antiphonal patterns and thick vocal textures that will become aural hallmarks of John's pulpit performances:

> The straining men would bear down on the lining bars and grunt, "Hanh!"
> "Hanh!"
> "Got de number ten!"
> "Hanh!"
> "Got de pay-car!"
> "Hanh!"
> "On de rear end."
> "Hanh!"
> "Whyncher pick 'em up!"
> "Hanh!"
> "Set it over."
> "Hanh!"
> And the rail was in place. Sometimes they'd sing it into place, but with the same rhythm. (106)

Sundquist's analysis of this material, and the way it builds on earlier efforts by James Weldon Johnson and Sterling Brown "to demonstrate the origins—or at least the primary analogues—of [African American] vocal arts in black

labor itself" (*Hammers* 72), remains unsurpassed in the critical literature on *Jonah's*. He notes how Hurston's use of the term "straining" links the laboring bodies of the lining crew "to the cognate rhythmic labor, straining, and bearing up that will appear in the preacher's sermonic performance," where it manifests as what one churchgoer in the novel calls "uh good strainin' voice" (*Jonah's* 89). What is more, the "grunting expulsion[s] of breath" (Sundquist, *Hammers* 73) that Hurston designates by means of the exclamation "Hanh!" supply the "hidden rhythmic law" of work song and sermon alike (74), taking their cue from hammer, ax, and maul to offer "percussive reminders of ancestral drumming" (72; cf. P. Harrison 45).[26] These vocal but nonverbal sounds, of course, are precisely the kind of aural material that the peculiar excellence of the phonograph captured and reproduced accurately.

That they issue specifically from a tie camp and a lining crew certainly points to the railroad as "the crucible of African American vernacular song," as Sundquist suggests (*Hammers* 72), but the novel points even more specifically to the locomotive's steam engine as the other primary model for the straining sounds in John's repertoire. Long before he labors directly in its service, after all, John has experienced the "fiery-lunged monster" (Hurston, *Jonah's* 16) as a living, laboring, "panting" (15) creature whose "very sides seemed to expand and contract" with the effort of breathing (16). Before he has ever chanted in time with his ax or in unison with his fellow crewmen, he has heard the atmosphere vibrate with the percussive expulsions of pent-up air that follow the rhythmic pulse of pistons: "around the bend came first the smoke stack, belching smoke and flames of fire. The drivers turning over chanting 'Opelika-black-and-dirty! Opelika-black-and-dirty!' Then as she pulled into the station, the powerful whisper of steam. Starting off again, 'Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Wolf coming! Opelika-black-and-dirty, Opelika-black-and-dirty! Auh—wah-hoooon'—into the great away that gave John's feet such a yearning for distance" (41). Here is perhaps the phonograph's most meaningful ancestor, from the vantage point of African American culture, as a talking machine, and what it "says" to John in its violent exhalations of "Wolf" or "wah-hoooon" is of a piece with what he and his cohorts will manage to coax from their own heaving sides and burning lungs as they lay its bed. It is perhaps in acknowledgment of this connection that one of the lining chants grafts the signature sound of human straining onto an overt onomatopoeic imitation of the engine itself: "Ahshack-uh-lack-uh-lack-uh-lack-uh-lack-uh-lack-uh-*hanh*!" (106; emphasis added). The hybridity of this folk formula suggests that Sundquist's musings on the hidden rhythmic laws of black vernacular expressivity may be due for a modest reassessment: the foundations of such laws lie not only in the swing of the hammer but in the whisper of steam.

This huge assortment of culturally resonant sounds, and the expressive forms of singing, speechmaking, praying, preaching, chanting, and straining through which they are conveyed, all converge in John's greatest achievement as a man-of-words, his farewell sermon to the congregation at Zion Hope Baptist Church, where he has served as pastor for a generation after moving to Florida. It is now common knowledge among Hurston scholars that this sermon, which ranges from ruminations on the wounds of Jesus to apocalyptic visions of salvation and judgment, is a verbatim reproduction of an actual sermon by the Reverend C. C. Lovelace that Hurston transcribed on a collecting trip to Eau Gallie, Florida, on May 3, 1929 (Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston* 197), and published independently in 1934 as part of "The Sermon," a folklore essay, in Nancy Cunard's *Negro: An Anthology*. Less commented upon is that the sermon contains what may be the novel's only specific acknowledgment of the phonograph—if the admonition that "[t]he blues we play in our homes is a club to beat up Jesus" can be taken to refer to the domestic enjoyment of contemporary race records (*Jonah's* 175). And this is fitting, for the sermon is at once John's and the novel's supreme feat of synthetic phonography. Hurston's meticulous sound-writing captures the aural nuances of John's performance and in so doing reveals that performance to be a tour de force of sound-writing in its own right, gathering the acoustic motifs that have shaped one man's history into something like an aural memoir.[27]

Some of these motifs show up in the sermon as conventional images. The thunder that gets the novel under way, for instance, reappears as "de terrific bolts of thunder" that "bust in de clouds" as Jesus and the disciples cross the Sea of Galilee (179). The drums that lurk beneath the dance rhythms of the barbecue—and that will bid farewell to John at his funeral—resurface as "de drums of de wind," from which God takes "a thimble full of breath" to make man (176; see also 178). The world of the work camps is memorialized in "the hammers of creation" that pound "upon the anvils of time" to forge "the ribs of the earth" (175) and in "the stroke of the master's axe" that sends mountains "to their rocky knees" at the crucifixion (179). And if "the breath of fire" that is God's creative power (175) is not enough to evoke the fiery-lunged monster from the Notasulga railroad station, there are always "de well ordered train of mercy" (178) and its rival "damnation train" (180), the latter of which whistles for calvary before ramming its cowcatcher into Jesus's side and derailing on the divine blood (181).

But John also strives for more direct enactments of the formative sounds of his history and culture. Take this description of heaven as paved with streets that give off music underfoot—a popular African American belief also documented in Hurston's folklore writing:[28]

I can hear Him when He walks about the golden streets
I can hear 'em ring under His footsteps
Sol me-e-e, Sol do
Sol me-e-e, Sol do (178)

The vocalizations of musical notes come straight from the choir practices at Macedony Baptist, all the way down to the individual syllables "sol," "do," and "me" (cf. 53), as if John is using his voice to retrieve phonographically sounds stored away in his memory. The sermon is even more attentive to the sound of breathing as the material foundation and extralexical trace of the speaking voice. As Sundquist also recognizes, Hurston's decision to render nearly all of the performance in verse rather than prose form, and to omit ending punctuation from the verse lines, allows her to arrange each line as an intimate record of the rhythms of inhalation and exhalation, in "a metrical scheme based on breathing" that gives the text "a form that is 'readable' only to the degree that it is 'heard'" (*Hammers* 65).[29] What is more, when John "warms up" to his subject and "goes natural"—as Hurston describes it in a glossary entry (*Jonah's* 206)—his breaths begin to punctuate his delivery in a manner that brings into the performance the huffing of the locomotive and the straining of the work camp in all their aural immediacy:

When God said, ha!
Let us make man
And the elders upon the altar cried, ha!
If you make man, ha!
He will sin
God my master, ha!
Father!! Ha-aa! (175)

It is surely significant that the preacher commences his own straining at the very moment in the sermon when God first speaks—and when he embarks upon the creation of the human race. The sound aligns the creative labors of deity, work crew, and minister: the forging of a cosmos, the crafting of a built environment, and the shaping of an imaginary world. Credit Hurston with capturing the aural properties of straining as they arise from the worksite, the station, and the pulpit—but credit John with reproducing this value-laden sound for his parishioners and linking it with the highest form of creative power.[30]

In this light it becomes clear why the Reverend Felton Cozy stands no chance of unseating John from his ministry when Pearson's enemies in the church arrange to have what amounts to a preach-off at Zion Hope. Cozy is Pearson's junior and a "race man" who likes to tackle social issues head-on from the pulpit (158), but his appeals to racial pride and his ostentatious habit of donning and doffing his "Oxford glasses" during his sermon fail

to impress the faithful, one of whom dismisses the performance as "uh lecture" (159). The good sister has chosen her words with care: "lecture," with its roots in the Latin verb *legere*, suggests an oration that is read aloud, delivered from a prepared script.[31] Cozy's antics with his glasses only underscore the effect. Compared with the power of John's pulpit phonography, Cozy's literacy seems thin and hopelessly outdated; as a self-professed handler of the "Alphabets" (158), he remains stuck in Kittler's discourse network of 1800. John, though the elder, is ultimately the more modern figure. "[H]is far famed 'Dry Bones' sermon," which climaxes with its own thrilling evocation of straining as the horse in the valley of Jehoshaphat exclaims, "Ha, ha! There never was a horse like me!" (158), brings down the house.[32] Cozy is no match for this sort of sound technology. He has to wait for John to step down voluntarily to assume his mantle at Zion Hope.

Hemenway, who characterizes the farewell sermon as "the most important literary event" in *Jonah's* as the novel approaches its conclusion (*Zora Neale Hurston* 197), also points out a problem with the performance: "Although it . . . represents John's inspired powers, it gives us few insights into John's interior struggle. His language does not serve to articulate his personal problems because it is directed away from the self toward the communal celebration" (198). Indeed, self-awareness comes at a premium for John throughout the novel; his inability to see the implications of his behavior, or to divine the motives behind it, is one of his—and for many readers, including Hemenway (200), one of the novel's—biggest flaws. He is absolutely sincere in professing his undying devotion to Lucy, and equally sincere in his pursuit of other women throughout his marriages to her and to two subsequent wives after her death. He is conscientious toward his "chillun" at Zion Hope (Hurston, *Jonah's* 182), yet aloof from and at times resentful of his own children. The novel repeatedly suggests that other characters—Alf Pearson; the Zion Hope deacon Hambo; John's third wife, Sally Lovelace; and especially Lucy—see more deeply into John than he sees into himself.[33] We begin to appreciate the irony behind the eulogy that closes John's funeral and the novel, "He wuz uh man, and nobody knowed 'im but God" (202). That "nobody" includes John himself, perhaps most of all. He "perceiv[es] the world in striking images," writes Hemenway, "but he can never really understand himself. He is a poet who graces his world with language but cannot find the words to secure his own personal grace" (*Zora Neale Hurston* 196; see also Holloway, *Character* 60).

Hemenway sees John's troubles as stemming from a deep cultural schism that he embodies more fully than anyone else in his world: the conflict between residual and emergent ideologies in the modernizing African American community.[34] John's "access to a pre-Christian cultural memory" through his intimacy with folk rituals makes him "capable of great inspi-

ration" but also "capable of so-called Christian immorality, an immorality arising less from personal inadequacy . . . than from the limitations of American culture, a civilization that denies the beat of the drum, as it denies John's manhood" (*Zora Neale Hurston* 200). John himself says roughly as much on leaving the pulpit of Zion Hope: "dey's ready fuh uh preacher tuh be uh man uhmongst men, but dey ain't ready yet fuh 'im tuh be uh man uhmongst women" (Hurston, *Jonah's* 182). The genteel values of upwardly mobile African Americans like the middle-class Pottses of Notasulga or the black strivers of Eatonville and Sanford will not tolerate the confluence of sacred and erotic energies infusing the older, African-inflected spiritualities that survive in folk beliefs and traditions in the South. John is caught in this double bind, adored and reviled as his people's most representative man, but according to Hemenway his "function as a giver of words" orients him toward public rather than private experience and as such "denies him the self-awareness that could lead him to a resolution of . . . the cultural dilemma that created his frustration" (*Zora Neale Hurston* 200).

John, though, is a giver of words—and sounds—of a most specific kind, and his problems with self-understanding look a little different when considered in light of the information technologies that provide a template for his cultural practice. To do this we must return to the crisis in subjectivity introduced by the phonograph and other devices like it. Recall how Grivel sums up the dilemma of mechanical sound storage and retrieval: "self in the lack of subject" (35), which could be alternately characterized as voice in the lack of self. In the discourse network of 1900, the phonographic subject is no longer a center of agency or a source of deep interiority; those paradigms went out along with the monopoly of Felton Cozy's alphabetic literacy over information storage. The subject of modern media formations is a site of the aleatory, what Kittler calls a random generator, "produc[ing] discourse without sense or thought": a nexus of sensory and linguistic phenomena that cannot ultimately be traced to deep structures of coherent or continuous selfhood, only to the stochastic facticity of the body (*Discourse Networks* 229). If a phonograph is thus one of the last places one should go looking for interiority (Nipper's expectant gaze notwithstanding), the same can be said for a phonograph with a man skin.

So when John looks down upon his parishioners and proclaims, "When Ah speak tuh yuh from dis pulpit, dat ain't me talkin'" (122), *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is telling a very precise kind of truth. John of course means that it's "de voice uh God speakin' thru me," that he is possessed by the divine spirit, so that once "de voice is thew, Ah jus' uhnother one uh God's crumblin' clods." But the novel means more. For as we have seen, when John takes the pulpit, it *isn't* him talking: it's the locomotive talking, and the church choir, and the lining crew, and the school pageant, and the thunder and lightning, and the

woods and creek at night, and the African drum, and the ax man in the tie woods, and on and on and on. What remains of John "himself" to speak of—or to *speak*—at such moments is tenuous, having been displaced and subsumed beneath the amassed weight of this sonic content. John's preaching thus demonstrates the fundamental rule of his character: there is no there there, only a stockpile of accumulated gestures, voices, and sounds. Inasmuch as the novel *personifies* him, it does so only loosely, provisionally, much as early phonograph users endowed the machine with human attributes (Brady 40–43). This is perhaps one reason that his listeners respond to his performances with the same sort of upheaval and "frenzy" (Hurston, *Jonah's* 158, 181) that greeted early phonograph demonstrations. He must be as unpredictable and uncanny to them as the locomotive, that other talking machine, once was to him.

This, then, is exactly the kind of man who can wake up one morning and wonder how he came to be married to his second wife (142): "in the lack of subject," whoever could have come up with such an idea, displayed the requisite initiative and agency? Hemenway's account of Pearson's predicament late in the novel evokes the peculiar emptiness that actually plagues him throughout the story: "he is washed out, voided, left only with instincts which he does not understand and for which he is condemned" (*Zora Neale Hurston* 196). And if such instincts are shaped by culture, John's fate as a human phonograph is to store and retrieve such cultural information, not to process it. This leaves him unable to grow or change as a character, to put information to work as wisdom in the service of guiding his conduct. John doesn't develop, he accrues: experiences, accolades, women, sounds. And when the cultural data he takes in prove contradictory, he is not capable of reconciling the contradictions, only of reproducing them. He is so incorrigible as a character precisely because he is so mechanical (like a device that can only go through the same limited motions over and over), having fully incorporated the logic behind the information technology of his time. He ultimately performs the same function that Kahn ascribes to the phonograph: a machine critique of the self-reflexive, self-possessed subject and "the presence of the voice" (*Noise* 8). That his greatest asset as a folk figure—the accuracy and comprehensiveness with which he reproduces culturally meaningful sounds—should prove his greatest liability as a literary protagonist, who is expected to round out and mature, is surely one of the novel's most suggestive ironies.

That John's voice issues from the split subject of phonography may help explain why his greatest vocal performances inevitably emerge out of experiences of dividedness, crisis, conflict. Lowe has noted that "the rising level of John's personal agony" is typically accompanied by a "commensurate increase in his pulpit eloquence" (*Jump* 147), but this pattern is already in place

long before John is called to preach. As early as chapter 2, on the morning after his introduction to "Mehaley's blandishments" (25), John stays home from school, feeling unworthy of being in Lucy's presence. In his anguish he finds a "prayin' ground," whereupon the boy, who to this point in the novel has been a figure of relatively few words, launches spontaneously into an elaborate display of his verbal gifts: "O Lawd, heah 'tis once mo' and again yo' weak and humble servant is knee-bent and body bowed—Mah heart beneath mah knees and mah knees in some lonesome valley cryin' fuh mercy whilst mercy kinst be found. O Lawd! you know mah heart, and all de ranges uh mah deceitful mind—and if you find any sin lurkin' in and about mah heart please pluck it out and cast it intuh de sea uh fuhgitfulness whar it'll never rise tuh condemn me in de judgment" (25).

Unfortunately, John's particular weakness "rises" again with indefatigable regularity in the narrative, and each time the ensuing sexual guilt and confusion produce voice. An evening of hide-and-seek with Mehaley (featuring more hiding than seeking) prompts the Sunday morning prayer that turns Macedony Baptist into an amplifier (52). A few years later, chastened by a confrontation with Lucy over his affair with Big 'Oman, John unveils his straining voice for the first time in a prayer meeting, electrifying the deacons:

> You are de same God, Ah
> Dat heard de sinner man cry.
> Same God dat sent de zigzag lightning tuh
> Join de mutterin' thunder.
> Same God dat holds de elements
> In uh unbroken chain of controllment. (88)

A subsequent argument with Lucy "'bout dem trashy women [he] lusts after once in uh while" (111) is followed in rapid order by John's announcement to his Florida brethren that he has been called to the pulpit. And his two most masterful displays of preaching, the "Dry Bones" sermon (158) and the farewell sermon (174–181), are both responses to public doubts about his suitability for the ministry, fueled by local outcry over the sorry state of his second marriage, a union marked by infidelity, physical abuse, and well-earned recriminations on both sides. In every case, voice seems to pour forth from the gap where a stable, consistent, morally reliable self should be but, in John's case, isn't. As such, voice marks the site of a divided consciousness where different manifestations of modernity converge upon and compound each other.

In an influential essay, Henry Louis Gates Jr. approaches the problem of voice in Hurston's most well-known novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in related terms. The problem, in a nutshell, is that the later novel, a woman's bildungsroman whose primary focus is its heroine's acquisition of a voice,

nonetheless appears to deprive her of that voice by relegating control of the tale to an anonymous third-person narrator who tells huge portions of Janie Crawford's story for her.[35] Gates, however, observes that as the novel progresses and Janie "approaches self-consciousness" (191), this third-person narrative commentary begins to morph into a free indirect discourse that combines properties of standard English usage with figurative and dialect elements of the direct discourse of Janie, Joe Starks, and other members of "the novel's black speech community" (xxvi). The "bivocal utterance" that results (208) is for Gates the novel's signal achievement, functioning as a "rhetorical analogue" (207) and performative enactment of African American double consciousness, "a dramatic way of expressing a divided self." And this is crucial, for Janie's discovery of just this sort of self-division turns out to be the enabling condition for the emergence of her voice: "her ability to name her own division," "her newly found and apparently exhilarating double-consciousness, is that crucial event that enables her to speak and assert herself, after decades of being defined almost exclusively by others" (204; also see B. Johnson 163–164). Rather than obstructing Janie's voice, then, the narrative discourse of *Their Eyes* objectifies the interior bifurcation that makes that voice possible. "It is this theme," writes Gates, "and this rhetoric of division, which together comprise the modernism" of *Their Eyes* (208) and, by extension, the modernity of its protagonist. Still, we should exercise caution before rushing to embrace this fragmented modern subjectivity in too uncritical or celebratory a spirit. As Sidonie Smith reminds us, "Shattering the old notion of the unitary individual in favor of the split and multiply fragmented [modern] subject may not always serve emancipatory objectives" for members of historically underrepresented or oppressed groups still pursuing access to traditional liberal models of subjectivity and the political rights and civic legitimacy those older models confer on communities and persons (156).

John Pearson exhibits this politically conflicted and ethically unresolved form of modern identity. For him, as for Janie, voice proceeds from double consciousness, an irreconcilable tension between African and American, folk and modern, "pagan" (Hurston, *Jonah's* 141) and Christian elements of his identity. Where John differs from Janie, though, is in the double inflection of his double consciousness, its roots not only in the African American historical predicament (what a reader of Du Bois might be tempted to call the discourse network of 1903) but in the cross-cultural convulsions of the Edison era. Those convulsions meant uncertain, rather than strictly emancipatory, possibilities for those still seeking a place at the table in liberal society. In its portrait of a technologically mediated vernacular sensibility, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* records the straining that attends such ontologically and politically fraught subject positions.

Where Is the Voice Coming From?: *Moses, Man of the Mountain*

To evoke the technological unconscious of *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, Hurston's third novel and her fifth and final book of the 1930s, it may be enough to recall the moment in the narrative when, seemingly trapped by Pharaoh and his "Egyptian horde" upon the shore of the Red Sea, Moses "turn[s] his back" on the advancing army and "show[s] his power" by speaking to the Hebrews, "his people," "in their own dialect as one of them" (190). "[I]n a sterner voice than they had ever heard before," he tells them not to fear and reassures them that the Lord will intervene on their behalf. "Moses didn't lift his hand while he talked"—the famous right hand that had brought plagues down on Egypt—"but the command in his voice was calming. Suddenly everybody felt secure and brave" (190).

This is not the first scene in Hurston, of course, in which a "big voice" addresses an ethnic group and forges a sense of collective identity and well-being with his words. As we have seen, John Pearson preaches African American cultural empowerment to a congregation of several hundred at Zion Hope Church. And in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie's second husband, Joe Starks, inspires and entertains an Eatonville population that may number a hundred or so with speeches that play an important role in the town's incorporation as an all-black community—and that also help get him elected mayor. What is unprecedented in *Moses* is the sheer scale of Moses's act. He speaks neither to a congregation nor to a community but to a *people*, an emergent nation, which by the narrator's count numbers "nearly two million people" (198). And he speaks to them directly.

What is more, he does this repeatedly over the final dozen chapters of the novel, the chapters that recount the Hebrews' sojourn in the wilderness as they struggle to become in fact—and not just in name—the nation that Moses has been charged by God to lead into the promised land. Approaching Mount Sinai with his tribe, Moses informs "everybody" that Jehovah is coming down to meet his people at the foot of the mountain (226). Later, faced with the backsliding of the Israelites into the idolatrous worship of Aaron's golden calf, he "crie[s] out" to the remaining faithful, "a great multitude" of "thousands upon thousands," to purge the nation of the offenders (238–239). Upon being threatened by "the mad clamor of the multitudes" who, out of cowardice or mere lack of confidence, balk at the prospect of taking Canaan by force (257), he calls the princes and elders into the tabernacle and tells "the people," by which the narrator again means "the nation," "to wait outside" (258). And after the death of Miriam in the wilderness, "Moses called a halt and told the people what it meant to lose a patriot" like the fallen priestess (265). "The people all listened and thought it was a great speech." Still other examples could be adduced to demonstrate

Moses's habit—or gift—of communicating with the Hebrew nation in its entirety via direct address.

This is neither inattention nor mere figurative language on Hurston's part. On numerous other occasions in the novel, authority figures address vast constituencies through more indirect and realistically plausible means. Pharaoh, for instance, hands down his oppressive edicts against the enslaved Hebrews by summoning a delegation of elders to his palace and instructing them to convey his orders to the common folk. Moses himself, upon assuming leadership of the Hebrews, is frequently shown dealing with similar delegations, committees, councils, and other representative bodies that serve as intermediaries between him and the nation. Such scenes explicitly contrast with those more heightened instances when Moses talks to the multitudes face-to-face.

How does he do it? How does he make his voice heard by two million people, by a nation whose tents "stretched for miles" on the plains of the desert (274)? The literal impossibility of such a scenario in Moses's historical era gives it away as the work of an authorial imagination shaped by modern-day spectacles of mass communication. Here the emphasis shifts from the storage and playback technologies that informed the representation of voice in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* to issues of transmission and broadcast, to the dissemination of aural information to a mass public whose demographic and spatial scope vastly exceeds the acoustic capability and range of the naked, unmediated speaking voice.[36] The most important technologies in Hurston's era to meet this need—to bridge the gap between the political orator and the nation—were the PA system (the electronic linkup of microphone, amplifier, and loudspeaker) and the radio. Indeed, the dynamic of voice and sound at work in *Moses*, and in particular between Moses himself and the mountain deity who claims him for the Hebrew people, displays significant affinities with the phenomenological and social experience of radio, including what critic Jeffrey Sconce calls its "electronic presence" (*Haunted* 6).

Hurston would have known something of that experience firsthand. In her letters she refers to radio auditions or appearances in 1931, 1934, and 1938, and in the early months of 1939 she participated in a thirteen-week series of commercial broadcasts on WLW in Cincinnati (see C. Kaplan 200–201, 329, 420–421). According to her biographer, it was also early in 1939 that Hurston was bringing the manuscript of *Moses, Man of the Mountain* to completion (Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston* 256). (The novel was published in November.) So it should come as no surprise that radio's new sensorium and social imaginary leave their mark on the conceptualization of voice in *Moses* in several distinct ways:

1. In comparison to other contemporaneous media, radio was capable of transmitting and receiving signals over vast distances, exceeding even the

range of telephone and telegraph technology. As James A. Connor has written, the radiophonic word "'spread out' over the landscape," inserting "the spoken word . . . into the world in an entirely new way" (20) and extending the effective reach of the voice to continental or even global dimensions (cf. M. Davidson 101), even as it, like so many of the other new communications media, lifted voice free of the human body. Adelaide Morris points out that "[a]dvertisements and cartoons of the 1920s and 1930s" featuring radios "again and again worry the enigmatic convergence of 'hear,' 'here,' and 'not here'" ("Sound Technologies" 38), and wireless rhetoric's habitual allusions "to the expanses of the oceans, to crowds, to other lands, and to the otherness of the unexplored globe" (Kahn, "Introduction" 21) are further attempts to conceptualize the medium's dramatic new ability to collapse space. Thanks to radio's electromagnetic signals, voices and other sounds could now navigate those spaces nearly instantaneously, securing real-time effects at their point of reception. In this sense, observes James Connor, radio transformed the way people experienced time as well as space (28; see also Cory 342; Jaffe 21; Sconce, *Haunted* 10–11, 63). The unprecedented velocities of the new technology were among the phenomenal hallmarks of modernism and its aesthetic and ideology of speed.[37]

2. Again unlike telegraphy and telephony, radio, as a wireless technology, played a leading role in the conceptual metamorphosis of the air, as the most conspicuous physical medium for the conduction of sound waves, into the *airwaves* of the twentieth-century popular imagination, "a newfound and newly populated space" (Kahn, "Introduction" 21) that revealed the "everyday substantial world" to be "no longer solid but itself transmissive" (Beer 153). In this more expansive sense the atmosphere itself, as a medium for seemingly immaterial messages, regained a numinous aspect it had been in danger of losing to nineteenth-century positivism. In a throwback to "the unrepresentable, mystical, and sublime heritage of the 'ether'" of an earlier era (Dyson 381), the "vagaries of the air" (Beer 149) were now understood to include not just ordinary acoustic vibrations but an exotic spectrum of mysterious signals, alien presences (Sconce, *Haunted* 94), and other strange new phenomena. This helps to account for the tendency among students of the wireless imagination to paraphrase Shakespeare's *Tempest*, as when James Connor characterizes "[r]adio air" as "full of noises" like Caliban's isle (18; cf. Beer 149).

3. Radio is a principal domain of the enigmatic figure that Michel Chion dubs the *acousmêtre*, a speaking voice that occurs in the absence of any visible origin or location: "the richest of voice-image relations," Chion calls it, "in which we don't see the person we hear" (9). As a phenomenon with its own developmental links to the primal sound environment of infancy, in which "the voice [i]s everything and it [i]s everywhere" (27) because the invo-

catory drive is not yet able to attach sounds reliably to discrete sources, the *acousmêtre* is associated with a range of powerful and often uncanny effects (and affects).[38] Though Chion develops his model of the *acousmêtre* as part of a larger effort to theorize the role of voice in cinema, even he pronounces it self-evident that "radio is acousmatic by nature. People speaking on the radio are *acousmêtres* in that there's no possibility of seeing them" (21; see Weiss 300).

4. Radio was the medium in which questions of voice, leadership, nationalism, and technology converged most powerfully in the 1930s, the decade of Hurston's greatest productivity as a writer. That period saw the rise of a large cohort of media-savvy and in some instances largely media-made political figures who capitalized on the power of radio and its companion medium, PA technology, to reach mass audiences and mold them into politically useful constituencies.[39] Alice Yaeger Kaplan has written wittily of "the insistence of the radio in the fascist unconscious" (138) and of "the ideal fascist broadcast" as creating an "ideologically vulnerable space of listening" that "extend[s] the listener into an imaginary crowd spirit" (136–137) leaving him or her emotionally receptive to the transcendent "overvoice" of the dictator (150).[40] To this end, the Nazi regime made "inexpensive radio receivers . . . readily available" to German citizens "to exploit the propaganda potential Goebbels saw in the electronic medium" (Cory 348–349).[41] Along related lines, Hitler observed in the 1938 *Manual of German Radio* that "[w]ithout the loudspeaker, we would never have conquered Germany" (qtd. in Attali 87).[42] But in truth the radiogenic leaders of the era came from all points along the political spectrum: in addition to Hitler and Mussolini, they included FDR, Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and eventually Winston Churchill. Whether the message leaned left or right, however, the use of broadcasting as a political tool linked it with the specters of authoritarianism and totalitarianism that shadowed discussions of popular leadership during this period.[43]

Sconce has charted the experiential shift that accompanied the transition from radio's largely amateur "wireless" era in the 1900s and 1910s, a period characterized by "DX fishing" and point-to-point communication between individual users, to the broadcast era of the 1920s, 1930s, and beyond, when the radio set moved in from the garage to the living room and its transmission capabilities gradually atrophied in favor of the reception of mass, corporate-organized programming.[44] "Domesticated through the broadcast schedule, the radio signal . . . saturated the entire atmosphere and blanketed the social body. . . . In this new listening environment, engaging the presence of radio no longer meant searching for stray voices in the ether, but implied joining a nation of listeners in the simultaneous consumption of broadcast culture" (Sconce, *Haunted* 93), a culture that was in many ways more homogeneous

and predictable than the diverse, ephemeral, and at times subversive interplay of voices that characterized the wireless era. "As the fleeting transmissions of wireless . . . were driven out by the routine and virtually omnipresent signals of broadcasting, the ether became . . . more like a net or blanket" (93–94). This imagined net directly figured the broadcast network as a material formation, a capitalist organization of power (see Sconce, "Wireless" 38–39; Newman 168; Russo 258; Willihnganz 125, 131); it gave public intellectuals and other figures a way to think about the implications of placing control over access to speech, thought, and information in private, elite, and largely centralized hands (Lenthall 54–55). As a reorganization of the technological and economic infrastructure of the new medium, broadcast radio played a powerful nationalizing role during the 1920s and 1930s (R. Brown 4–5; Hilmes 1–33), especially in the way it fashioned, disseminated, and promoted representations of a broadly shared national culture (Hilmes 16–19; Lenthall 41–42).[45]

But for many in what Debra Rae Cohen calls radio's second generation (145), the rise of broadcasting carried more unsettling overtones, for the broadcast era marked the evolution of radio into a largely one-way medium, in which messages issued from centralized sources to blanket audiences of millions of people (Jenemann 92; Lewty 210; Willihnganz 126–127). In this new mass media environment, radio's "potentially liberatory" features threatened to morph into "their dark opposites" (Cohen 145), with "accessibility becom[ing] inescapability; education, indoctrination; radio's phatic power . . . [a] destructive force; and its peculiar intimacy, intrusion, seduction, violence." Sconce similarly notes "signs of dismay, disenchantment, and apprehension" in popular culture representations of radio during this period (*Haunted* 94). A "more totalitarian radio" surfaced in the public imagination, "a harbinger of potential subjugation" linked to the specter of authoritarian control. Seen in this light, the fascist love affair with radio was more than an arbitrary fixation.[46] Indeed, Frankfurt School intellectuals like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argued that broadcast radio was intrinsically fascist in its technological structure, "invad[ing] even the most private spaces, never ceas[ing] its activity, and permi[tting] no reply by the audience" (Apostolidis 468; see also Lewty 210; Willihnganz 131, 138). Even the nationalizing function of broadcasting prompted anxieties about the networks' capacity to forge "a national audience . . . against its own will" (Sconce, *Haunted* 109) in the ominous scenario Sconce labels "forced patriation" (16). In this context, the radiogenic figures who rose to cultural and political leadership in the United States and elsewhere during the 1930s take on a more complex and potentially menacing aspect.

Critics have recognized *Moses, Man of the Mountain*—which traces Moses's career from his upbringing in the royal house of Egypt, through his exile

among the Midianites, the theophany at Sinai, his return to Egypt and liberation of the Hebrews, and his forty-year sojourn in the wilderness with them, to his final clandestine departure to resume his quest for the secrets of God and nature as the nation of Israel prepares to enter Canaan—as a novel preoccupied with the issue of political and cultural leadership. Ruthe T. Sheffey goes so far as to call the novel a "[f]ictionalized [m]anifesto" on the subject and hails Moses as an epitome of the "natural" leader extolled in many West African cultures, a figure whose "closest counterpart in the Afro-American society was the black preacher" (162): "wise," "eloquent," earnest, commanding a "deep pathos of language," and committed to the principle of "black collectivity" (163).[47] Such a characterization bears more than a passing resemblance to another priestly figure and culture hero, John Pearson of *Jonah's*. But the ironies and ambivalences surrounding John as a leader and representative of his people in the earlier novel should give us pause before we rush to celebrate Moses's leadership skills. In a 1991 foreword to *Moses*, Deborah McDowell sounds this more cautious note, pointing out the text's "elusiveness" on questions of authority and power: "every attempt to penetrate to some essential, extractable political position or source is concealed behind the mélange of humor, conjure stories, folktales, and braided historical narratives, and is ultimately thwarted" (xvi). And in the most detailed analysis of the text to date, Lowe suggests that the novel "ironically signif[ies] . . . on all forms of authority" (*Jump* 207), including that of Moses and his God, and that Hurston exhibits a "divided loyalty to Moses and the opposed goals of the people he leads" that "problematizes the book" (230). The novel "locates much of its tension . . . in the unresolved struggle" between Moses and the unruly, cantankerous, ungrateful, and often impious Hebrews, whose minds are more often on their bellies and their personal safety than on the loftier responsibilities that go along with chosenness and nationhood (232). This tension "seems, on its surface, to balance benevolent dictatorship . . . with the libertarian impulses of individuals" whose behavior "could be described as creative rather than rebellious" (206). Characterizing Moses as a benevolent dictator who stifles the folk energies of the very people he sets out to emancipate does not exactly constitute a rousing endorsement of his leadership.[48]

At least one of Hurston's African American contemporaries linked these issues of power and leadership directly to the institution of broadcast radio during the Depression era. In the mid-1930s, Richard Wright labored on a novel he called "Cesspool," which went unpublished during his lifetime, finally appearing posthumously as *Lawd Today!* in 1963. The novel recounts a day in the life of an African American man, Jake Jackson, who works at a branch of the U.S. post office in Chicago. Throughout the day, Jake experiences an onslaught of disembodied voices, invisible yet invasive, that crowd

upon and threaten to overwhelm his own thoughts, words, and actions. The insistent voice of a radio announcer finds its workplace equivalent in the imperious but largely anonymous voices of Jake's white superiors at the post office. As critic Jonah Willihnganz perceptively notes, these voices function as the novel's modern equivalent of naturalistic forces shaping and dictating individual behavior (128). In this way *Lawd Today!* recognizes communication as "central to a subject's consciousness and agency" (131) and radio as "a new way of exercising power" within that modern scheme (125). Moreover, argues Willihnganz, Wright uses radio's power to dispossess subjects vocally—to drown out their voices and thwart their "capacity to speak and have that speech matter" (129)—as a means of illuminating both how African Americans like Jake experience the exercise of white power *and* how modern subjects experience the operation of fascism:

> Each experience—that of radio, fascism, and the racism of the period—is figured as losing one's voice to disembodied voices. Each experience is figured as . . . a loss of a natural capacity to communicate, to enter into the speech situation of one's culture. Each experience is of mystified voices and hypnotic power (control through forms of speech). Each experience is of the calculated and programmed masquerading as the authentic and unmediated. In *Lawd Today!*, the radio is to the listener as fascism and racism [are] to the subject. All operate as inanimate, magical silencing voices. (126–127)

Jake's response to this state of affairs is equally troubling. "[T]o combat white power," he fantasizes about "a single disembodied voice that can unify all blacks and literally dictate destruction" (138), "a figure who can act on whites the same way Jake and his friends feel they are acted on," a militaristic black leader whose characteristics unnervingly evoke and mimic those of a fascist dictator. As Willihnganz observes, Jake's fantasy reveals "the way oppression tends to breed the desire to oppress," as well as "the way the disempowered tend to project the solution to their disempowerment onto a figure outside themselves," thereby colluding in their own marginalization. Wright would return to the issue of fascism's appeal to the black masses in *Native Son* and its companion essay, "How 'Bigger' Was Born." For now, I simply wish to note that the figure of whom Jake dreams, one "who commands, compels, and even destroys with the power of his voice" (Willihnganz 134), looks—or, more to the point, *sounds*—a lot like Hurston's Moses. The historical and typological links between the Hebrews of the Exodus narrative and the U.S. black community only underscore the resemblance further.

Taking its cue from its times, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* suggests repeatedly, and in a variety of ways, that political authority and leadership come down in the end to voice control—the inflection, transmission, delegation, and public performance of the spoken word and its translation into

power. The novel's two most effective leaders, for instance, Moses and his Midianite father-in-law and mentor, Jethro, are noted for addressing the people they guide and serve in the people's own vernacular dialect. Moses adopts this rhetorical tactic first among Jethro's people (92), then among the Hebrews, where his colloquial gifts are praised over those of his foil, Aaron, one of the novel's icons of the poor leader:

> So when the people crowded up before the two men, Moses spoke to them as a Hebrew.
>
> "Eh, eh!" one old crone exclaimed with pleasure. "Moses is getting so he talks our language just like we talk it ourselves."
>
> "Yeah, and the more Moses gets natural with us, the stiffer Aaron gets. He tries to sound like some high-toned Egyptian talking proper—when he don't forget to do it."
>
> "And that's what makes it funny—he forgets." (204)

One is reminded of the women in *Jonah's* who comment on the differences between John Pearson's preaching style and Felton Cozy's. But Hurston's anatomy of voice and authority in *Moses* is ultimately far more radical than this bit of rhetorical populism would indicate, encompassing forms of vocal projection and manipulation that approach outright ventriloquism—or sound technologies like radio—in the way they strip voice loose from the body, wrench subjectivity out of place, and raise troubling questions about authoritarian power and control.

The correlation between voice and leadership is borne out by the opening chapters of the novel, where both are significant in their absence among the suffering Hebrews of Egypt. The text begins with the whispers and muffled cries of Hebrew women in labor: "Pharaoh ha[s] entered the bedrooms of Israel" with a eugenics law prohibiting the birth of boy babies, so the women retreat to "caves and rocks" to go through childbirth in secret, "press[ing] their teeth together" to keep from "cry[ing] out loud," while the anxious fathers try to "breathe out their agony without sound" (Hurston, *Moses* 1). (Any similarities between Pharaoh's laws and the Nuremberg Laws, or for that matter the Jim Crow laws only marginally higher up the slippery slope of genocide, are doubtless purely intentional.) In this totalitarian environment, in which communication travels in one direction only, one's personal voice means danger. With Pharaoh's soldiers patrolling the night, the "very air in Goshen has ears" (10), and the whimpers of a newborn can bring other sounds in their wake: "[s]creams, gagging cries, metal on metal, metal on softer substances" (11). As slaves, the Hebrews have no legal or political voice: the elders summoned to appear before Pharaoh are there to listen, not to speak (19), and his bombast leaves little room for them to sneak a word in anyway. These are the circumstances that prompt Jochebed and Amram to

entrust to the Nile the "lusty"-throated boy-child (17) who, in Hurston's retelling of the biblical legend, is emphatically *not* Moses.

Leading this bowed and muted people to freedom and nationhood will entail introducing them to new sounds and initiating them collectively into voice, but in the early stages of the narrative, Moses, the son of Pharaoh's Egyptian daughter and an Assyrian prince, is not yet up to that daunting task. His friendship with Mentu, a wizened Egyptian stablehand, has taught him respect for the laboring classes and the value and wisdom to be found in their vernacular traditions (38–43). He also has his own ideas about the treatment of the Hebrews. On becoming commander in chief of Pharaoh's army, he lobbies for the inclusion of Hebrews in the fighting force. His counsel, however, falls on deaf ears around Pharaoh's court; as a political figure, Moses is not yet a voice to be reckoned with in Egypt. Accordingly, his most powerful act of advocacy for the Hebrews during this chapter of his life is a display of physical rather than rhetorical force: the killing of an Egyptian foreman who was abusing his Hebrew laborers on a public works project (66–67). The act makes Moses a pariah among the Egyptians, and his exile is the first step in his transformation into the warrior-priest who will lead the Hebrews out of Goshen. His solitary flight out of Egypt across the Red Sea is marked by a resonant passage that—perhaps because its cadences evoke the rhythms of African American preaching—has been one of the most frequently commented-upon in the novel (78). Significantly, the crossing from Africa into Asia also ushers Moses into a new sound world. That very night, at a caravan rest stop, he is introduced (anachronistically) to the "intonations" of the blues (80), as a stranger plucks "a stringed instrument" and sings, "I had a good woman but the fool laid down and died," and he is further treated to a performance of Sudanese drumming (81) and a lively display of the dozens by a pair of camel drivers (80–81). He will soon encounter even stranger sounds, and more uncanny possibilities for voice, when his wanderings take him to Jethro's country of Midian.

From the outset, Jethro's domicile, "a huge tent" befitting a patriarch, is presented as a radically different aural environment from anything Moses was accustomed to in Egypt. Upon meeting the old man for the first time, he is startled when Jethro addresses him by name. "How did you know my name was Moses?," he asks (87), whereupon Jethro replies, "I don't know it. But that is what you were thinking when you came up." As Jethro explains after a later demonstration of this mysterious skill, "somehow other people's thoughts are like glass to me" (101). But what Jethro describes as clairvoyance can also be read as evidence of a wireless imagination at work in the novel. Like a radio receiver, the Midianite is able to pull messages out of the ether around him, to intercept signals—instantaneously—relayed in the immaterial medium of thought.[49] As such, the space he inhabits bears a striking

resemblance to Kahn's "newfound and newly populated" airwaves of wireless.

What is more, the novel suggests that this human receiving unit may double as a transmitter, that the theophany on Mount Sinai (125–127) may be a visual and aural spectacle that Jethro has conjured to convince Moses to fulfill his potential as a priest and leader and take up the cause of the Hebrews in Egypt. Jethro is a powerful magician and holy man in his own right, whose religion encompasses not only offerings to the mountain god but also a hoodoo-like mastery of "the secrets of plants and animals, and the living and the giving earth" (111). This wisdom he passes along to Moses, together with the conviction that his pupil is "sentenced by fate to lead men" (104). At the same time he whets Moses's curiosity about the "holy ground" (105) on Sinai:

> "[T]here is a god up there, Moses. I have heard voices."
>
> "Voices, Jethro?"
>
> "Yes, Moses. But I am not so sure I make out exactly what they say. Perhaps it calls for more power than I have to really understand. . . . But over and above all that I feel that the call was never meant for me. I know now that the God of the mountain has been waiting for you." (105)

Here we witness the full power of the acousmatic effect, as mysterious, sourceless voices herald the divine, whom Chion has identified as "the greatest Acousmêtre" of all (27). What is more, this acousmatic figure bears suggestive affinities with the "unknown alien presence, extraterrestrial or otherwise" that is linked to the broadcast signal in the technological imaginary of the thirties (Sconce, *Haunted* 94).

Moses remains reluctant to accept Jethro's invitation to introduce this strange new Asian god to the Hebrews in Egypt and lead them out of bondage (Hurston, *Moses* 121–122). Jethro, however, isn't giving up so easily, and a remark he makes to his daughter Zipporah hints that he has been holding his most persuasive tactic in reserve: "Well, he might think I'm through with the thing, but first and last he's going to find out different. . . . The backside of that mountain may get too hot to hold him yet" (124). And sure enough, only a page later, the bush bursts into flame and "a great voice" fills the air around Moses, addressing him by name—just as Jethro did on their first meeting—and commanding him to do exactly what Jethro has been unable to convince him to do by more conventional means: "go down into Egypt . . . tell that Pharaoh I say to let my people go . . . and lead my people to the place I have provided for them" (127). When the chastened and awestruck Moses reports the encounter to Jethro, the old man "seemed . . . to glow and swell with pleasure" (129), a response that could be read as an expression of pride and satisfaction in his own handiwork.[50] If so, then Moses's position is

not so unlike that of the stunned listeners who yielded to the verisimilitude of Orson Welles's broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* in October 1938, who mistook a radiophonic performance for a real event.[51]

Within the theophany, a god who may simply be a radiophonic creation exhibits (or at least claims) properties that themselves evoke wireless technology and the politics of broadcasting. From Mount Sinai, he tells Moses, he has "heard my people, the Hebrews, when they cried" in Egypt (127), "when they kept on groaning to me for help." The sounds that opened the novel—the suffering, attenuated voices of the Israelites—have thus traveled like an audio signal from Goshen to Sinai, Africa to Asia, where Jehovah, a sensitive receiver (again like Jethro), pulls them from the ether. And when Moses objects that his public speaking skills are not up to the task of advocating for the Hebrews or representing God's word to Pharaoh, the Lord voices his readiness to broadcast sound back across this same intercontinental divide: "Open your mouth and I'll speak for you." In this way, basic elements of a wireless imagination and a broadcast imaginary—the instantaneous transmission and reception, in the absence of any immediate bodily source or material relay, of an authoritative voice that claims to speak for the incipient nation and thereby (in several senses) to *forge* it—come together as the novel's own technology for evoking the omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of a deity who enters the narrative as a *genius loci* confined to a single mountaintop in Midian. Compare Allen Weiss's description of "the radiophonic work" of modernism: "with no visible body emitting the sound, and with no image whatsoever to anchor the sound," such texts leave "a sufficient space for fantasizing, a space large enough to contain . . . the theological projections of the grandest God" (301). Such is the space and such are the conditions in which Hurston's text imagines and articulates a divine presence which doubles as a centralized source and seat of authoritarian power.

If Moses starts out as an impressionable audience for Jethro's pyrotechnics and ventriloquism, by the time he reaches Egypt to battle Pharaoh he seems to have been let in on the secret and to be more than willing to exploit similar effects in the name of his newly adopted God. The novel establishes beyond doubt that he possesses the skills to produce such effects with or without divine assistance. Long before meeting Jehovah on Sinai, he has learned from Pharaoh's holy men that priests are tricksters who manipulate appearances to create the illusion of divinity via spectacular effects and thereby to control men (43–44, 59), and he goes on, under Jethro's tutelage, to become "the finest hoodoo man in the world" (114).[52] He learns to summon swarms of flies and of "every insect and reptile at will" (112–113), and to make it rain frogs (113). He cultivates the ability to turn water into blood (116), to inflict leprosy on his enemies, and to "bring on or drive off the cattle disease." He figures out how to produce "the excrescence that he called

Manna . . . on a certain plant" that grows in the wilderness (117). From the ancient Book of Thoth, which he retrieves from the bottom of the Nile at Koptos, he gains the power to control light and darkness and "to command the heavens and the earth, the abyss of the mountains, and the sea" (119). To the Midianites' religious ceremonies he introduces the use of incense to evoke the presence and breath of divinity—a technique lifted from the repertoire of the Egyptians (116; cf. 44). What is more, the "volume and mystery" of this "thick white mass" of smoke enhance the aural dimension of the service, making "the voice of the unseen Moses speaking behind the altar seem like the voice of God" (116)—a bit of acousmatic magic not so far removed from the technological wizardry by which an ordinary mortal conjures up the great and powerful figure of Oz, in a film released just months before the publication of Hurston's novel.[53]

These are of course all phenomena that will recur at critical moments in Moses's showdown with Pharaoh and during the subsequent exodus, where they are in every case attributed to Jehovah. The evidence, however, suggests that these attributions are rhetorical—pragmatically oriented efforts to consolidate the political authority of Moses and the marginalized people he and Jethro have (for whatever reason) chosen. Moses certainly doesn't blink, after all, when Jethro suggests that the best way to recruit Aaron to the cause is to appeal to his vanity by informing him, falsely, that "the Voice" on Sinai "mentioned him by name" (130)—an overt act of impersonation that complements the covert variety that more and more appears to be responsible for the theophany in the first place.

When we turn to the miracles that Moses performs on behalf of Israel (163–174), it is surely significant that so many of these phenomena are consistent with a radiophonic imaginary. What these signs and wonders have in common is the way Moses is able to summon them from the sky, the winds, the air to work the will of his sky god, Jehovah. Mysterious signals that fill the soundless vacuum of the ether with an alien intentionality, the plagues of Egypt—along with other airborne portents and interventions like the pillar of cloud that "spread[s] itself like a great plumey curtain" to hide the fleeing Israelites from the pursuing army of Pharaoh (190–191), or the mighty east wind that parts the waters of the Red Sea (191)—invite comparison with the strange new frequencies of radio, and with the catastrophes and disasters so frequently associated with broadcast coverage in the popular imagination (see Sconce, *Haunted* 108–112). Their immediate impact is to hurl the Egyptians into much the same totalitarian soundscape as the one that opens the novel in Goshen: an aural environment marked by the cries, whispers, and stunned silences of a people "stampeded by fear" and bereaved of their gods (175; cf. 5–6). Hurston makes the comparison even more explicit in her account of the Passover night: "Then the great cry arose in Egypt. . . .

It was the great cry that had issued first from the throat of Israel years before and spread out to the rim bones of the world and come back again. And now it poured out through the mouth of the Egyptian nation" (177–178). In its journey from the earth's surface to the farthest reaches of the atmosphere and back, this cry, like a signal arcing off the Kennelly-Heaviside layer to arrive half a world away, evokes the cosmic contours of radio's expansive new territory and the uncanniness of its characteristic "voice migrations" (T. Campbell 51).

These miraculous events—and numerous others detailed in the novel's account of the exodus—are specifically framed by Moses as realizations of divine voice. That voice is understood to manifest in two parallel ways: in language and as power. Moses carefully orchestrates the spectacles in Egypt to make this relationship clear: they are God's word translated directly into action. Again and again he formulaically reminds Pharaoh that "[t]he Lord says, 'Pharaoh, let my people go'" before bringing down the latest scourge (*Moses* 150; cf. 144, 154, 166). On one occasion he simply holds his rod motionless at arm's length before lowering it and declaring, "The Lord has spoken" (151), whereupon Pharaoh discovers that all the water in Egypt has turned to blood. The miraculous metamorphosis simply *is* the divine speech act just referred to. The voice of authority *is* power—the same totalitarian formula that seemed to underlie the technology and politics of broadcasting in the thirties.

In this context, the role of Moses's rod becomes especially suggestive, for that rod—a legacy of the original theophany (126–127)—is often instrumental in his efforts to convey divine pleasure or displeasure or otherwise to implement divine will. At Rephidim, for instance, he touches the rod to a cliffside and water surges from the rock to ease the thirst of the people (207). On a hilltop above Massah, he holds the rod aloft during an important battle and the unproven Hebrew army vanquishes the Amalekites (209–210). Repeatedly, the rod assists him in channeling Yahweh's agency into earthly results, performing the direct transformation of voice into power. In this respect, its equivalents in the 1930s—an era profoundly concerned with just such transformations—were the newly iconic instruments of electronic sound transmission: the radio antenna, the broadcast tower, the microphone. Like Moses's staff, with its sporadic mutations into a living serpent (126–127, 143–144), these contemporary tools for the projection of voice were inanimate objects that nonetheless seemed to harbor and relay a mysterious subjectivity integral to the display and expression of authority. With such a tool, an enterprising figure could mold, or rule, a nation.

This is more or less what Moses does with his rod and Jehovah's voice. Like the radiogenic black fascist leader whom Richard Wright envisioned, he leads

a subjugated people out of bondage and slowly, painfully shapes them into a collectivity worthy of a place among nations. The Hebrews' progress can be measured across a pair of sound portraits from different stages in their forty-year history in the wilderness. The first captures the cacophony of the backsliding multitudes as they cavort around Aaron's golden calf: "They cast off clothes and they cast off care. Drums and cymbals and harps and voices singing loud and happy. Shining bodies moved and turned and collided joyfully. Maidens danced in ecstasy with closed eyes and nobody looked too closely at faces. Joy was the feeling, joy!" (232). High on Sinai, where Moses is compiling the Ten Commandments (in what is perhaps the ur-instance of human phonography, turning God's voice into writing), the sound reaches him and Joshua as "a noise made up of many sounds" (233), "a wild and savage shout of voices and drums," and a "howling in idolatry" (235) that signals the degeneration of Israel's hard-won freedom into mere license, an aural anarchy that threatens "the essence of divinity expressed in order" that the new laws represent. This is the sound of unreadiness, unworthiness, the people not yet *a* people. Years of nation-building remain—wars, purges, wanderings—all under the iron hand of Moses. But when, a generation later, Moses climbs a second mountain—Pisgah, overlooking Canaan and the River Jordan—to take stock of his people, he beholds, and hears, something more promising: "The sounds of Israel's existence came up to him. The lowing of herds, hammering of metal, sounds of strife, of crying and dying and sounds of song. Moses felt happy over that. . . . He had given Israel back the notes to songs. The words would be according to their own dreams, but they would sing. They had songs and singers" (282–283). Here aural elements continue to clash, but the larger emphasis is on a diversely integrated soundscape, in a process that arguably tracks and mimics the formation of imagined community.[54] The scene contrasts not only with the earlier episode below Sinai but with the novel's opening sound portrait of the Hebrews cowering in misery and silence. "Now," Moses thinks, "God had a voice and glory" (284). With the arrival of this collective, popular voice, he can declare his work done.

But as he prepares to part ways with Israel, to walk away from absolute power and resume the quest for the secrets of nature and the occult knowledge that has always intrigued him, the novel never quite lays to rest the nagging possibility that the people he leaves behind have been duped by demagoguery and ventriloquism—that the God they are prepared to carry with them into Canaan is a chimera created by Jethro and Moses and perhaps handed along to Joshua in turn. Why else, indeed, would Hurston so conspicuously graft the episode of Balaam and his ass onto the closing pages of the text? This anecdote, after all, which Moses recounts during his final encounter with Joshua, explicitly documents ventriloquism:

> I fixed old Balaam up just like I did his mule and made him talk for our side. . . . Here was old King Balak sicking Balaam on us to curse us and making big sacrifices of bulls and goats and things on seven altars at a time. Then when Balaam opens his mouth to curse us, out comes a blessing on Israel. Old Balak got right in behind him for saying a blessing instead of a curse so Balaam moved the altars to another place and sacrificed seven times and got his mouth all full of curses again. But when he opened it, out come another blessing, and by that time Balaam was scratching his head and thinking sure enough. Well, the third time he tried it and got fooled, he made out he intended to do that all the time. But that was fun for me, outdoing Balaam like that. . . . Power loves to meet power and strength loves strength. (280–281)

Just so. Throughout the novel, to project voice in this way *is* power. Note, however, that nowhere in his reminiscence does Moses attribute this power to the Lord, as he ordinarily does in his public performances of authority. Instead, speaking in confidence to his most trusted associate, he takes full responsibility for it himself, acknowledging (rather boastfully) the blessings that issue from Balaam's mouth to be his work and his alone. How confident, then, can a reader be that the signs and wonders elsewhere ascribed to Jehovah are in truth the work of any higher authority than Moses himself? Is his authority ultimately the work and will of a divine being, or is it the conjuration of a radiogenic figure answering a subaltern population's fantasies of rallying behind a big voice?

This may shed light on Moses's curious habit of referring to the power that guides him as "Voice." Over the final dozen chapters in particular, "Voice," with an uppercase *V*, more or less becomes the novel's other name for God: "You, Voice, you told me to lead out, and by the hardest, I did it. So I'm down here by the Red Sea with these people. . . . What must I do with them now?" (194); "Why should I lead people whose ways are strange to me, and who neither understand me nor trust me? How come, Voice?" (200); "Forty years is a long time, Joshua, but the Voice commanded me to lead" (260). The cumulative effect of such passages (see also 127, 130–132, 214, 221, 225, 235, 246, 285) is to raise the possibility that with the use of this capitalized noun, Moses is describing, addressing, externalizing, and reifying his own voice, broadcasting it beyond himself in order to assign it its proper place as the real source of all the phenomena he elsewhere credits to Jehovah. If this is the case, then Moses is not only implicitly confessing to a cynical and self-serving form of political ventriloquism—with a deity for a dummy!—but also tacitly acknowledging a profound self-alienation and political cynicism. Where we might expect an intimate partnership linking voice, agency, and interiority, he points instead to a voice out of place, one that has taken on an independent, discorporated existence—floating in the ether, forever at a remove from him, and he from it. As noted in chapter 1, Russ Castronovo

has condemned the necro politics of just this sort of disembodiment, the way that, in the specific case of nineteenth-century spiritualist mediums and trance speakers, it fueled fantasies of "democratic possibility" (107) that helped entice Americans of the period to settle for thin, generic, and oppressively homogeneous models of U.S. citizenship rather than the more historically robust, socially diverse, and materially vibrant forms of identity, participation, and belonging that Castronovo favors for the nation's political culture. Hurston here arguably carries this critique further. Not content to reveal the spurious nature of the democratic possibilities attributed to disembodied personhood, she associates Moses's vocal performances—his distinctive version of mediumship—with *demagogic* possibilities whose political implications are even more troubling than those of Castronovo's necro citizenship.

We are left, then, with the irony that the hero of *Moses, Man of the Mountain* may ultimately owe his success as a priest and nation maker to a schism in voice and personality that displaces and decenters him as a subject even as it renders his people vulnerable to subjection. This is much the same duality, of course, that afflicts John Pearson, for better *and* for worse, as he forges ethnic community in *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. In the end each protagonist exhibits the telltale symptoms of mediat(iz)ed subjectivity: divided consciousness, self-estrangement, excessive or eccentric voice—the classic interference pattern that is the ontological legacy of modern sound technology. In this sense, their author's era has clearly left its mark on both figures. Fittingly, then, Hurston brings this pair of novels full circle by closing *Moses* with the same sound that opens *Jonah's*, the mutter of thunder that places human events in cosmic, ethereal context (287–288).[55]

Listening for Zora

In response to critics who have dismissed Harlem Renaissance writers for their perceived "'failure' to produce *vital*, *original*, *effective*, or 'modern' art in the manner, presumably, of British, Anglo-American, and Irish creative endeavors" (*Modernism* xiii), Baker argues that "Africans and Afro-Americans—through conscious and unconscious designs of various Western 'modernisms'—have little in common with Joycean or Eliotic projects" (xvi). In the spirit of Richard Godden's characterization of modernity as "a liberatory impulse drawing into conjunction worlds previously kept apart" (110), however—and in light of my preceding analysis—I question whether critical understanding of Hurston's work is well served by such oppositional thinking, by establishing such exclusively segregated geographic or ethnic enclaves of modernism.[56] Certainly Hurston is a participant in the black modernism mapped out by Baker—in which "achiev[ing] effective modernity" (36) is the

fundamental aesthetic, political, *and* economic objective—and in the black Atlantic version as defined by Paul Gilroy, in which "the concentrated intensity of the slave experience" singles out Afro-diasporic subjects "as the first truly modern people, handling in the nineteenth century dilemmas and difficulties which would only become the substance of everyday life in Europe a century later" (221), much as we see John Pearson tackling issues of cultural reproduction in the 1880s and 1890s that will preoccupy the high modernist writers of the Euro-American 1920s and 1930s. But as I hope I have demonstrated here, Hurston is also a stakeholder in the international modernism of Joyce and Eliot, a cartographer of the technologically mediated sensorium and imaginary theorized by Kittler, Beer, Kahn, Danius, Sconce, and others; and her version of this modernism is neither faulty nor deficient but original, vital, and thoroughly attuned to the perceptual and conceptual nuances of a new problematic. Her vernacular characters are not premodern figures nostalgically encased in a timeless folk authenticity that walls them off from world-historical complexities and convergences, as Hazel V. Carby and others have complained, but men and women whose rural spaces are haunted by the uneven temporalities and porous subjectivities ushered in by new negotiations between bodies and machines.[57] They are, in other words, imagined responses not only to the spatial and temporal dislocations of diaspora and migration, as Delia Konzett has convincingly argued (71–72), but also to the new distances, velocities, and ruptures introduced by the uncanny storage and transmission devices of their author's era. Such ruptures—between body and voice, and within consciousness itself—should be recognized as symptoms that attest to the influence of just the sort of "contemporary social crises" that Carby accuses Hurston of displacing in her work ("Politics" 76). I thus echo Suárez and Konzett in suggesting that the time has come for Hurston scholars to "revise the received wisdom" about her and "expand the usual frames of reference used to discuss her work" (Suárez 234–235) in order to attend more conscientiously to "the obscured modern element in her writings" (Konzett 89). The critical consensus has produced valuable scholarship over the years, but its vernacular accents have also deafened us to the presence of other frequencies at work in Hurston's texts. Tuning in those frequencies—learning to listen for Zora Neale Hurston in new and different ways—will be a crucial step toward honoring the full range of her voice.

CHAPTER THREE

Writing Blood

The Art of the Literal in William Faulkner's Light in August

There is only one thing that makes a race and that is blood.
—Benjamin Disraeli

It is possible to kill the human body with an idea.
—Thomas Dixon

Blood makes noise.
—Suzanne Vega

For its August 1995 issue, the alternative music magazine *Spin* sent a correspondent, appropriately named Eurydice, to San Francisco to explore an emerging sexual subculture, an offshoot of the S/M scene whose members, mainly women, engage in what they call "blood sports" (60). In local sex clubs promoting "safe blood play" (64), the reporter watches as young women insert open-topped hypodermic needles into the veins of their arms, splattering the room, and each other, with their jetting blood. "We love blood," one proclaims. "It drives us mad" (66). A twenty-something Ivy League graduate tells Eurydice, "I get off being bitten"; she lets the blood dry in streaks on her body. A "vampire stripper" and her boyfriend hire themselves out to clubs, sipping each other's blood out of insulin syringes and inviting audience members to do the same. Eurydice talks to couples who practice "cutting" as a form of foreplay, ritualistically—and, strange as it may seem, lovingly—slicing and scarring each other with razors, scalpels, hunting knives (62). Some drink the blood they spill during their lovemaking; others finger-paint on walls or the bodies of their partners (66). Still others find in scars a highly coveted form of adornment. At piercing salons with names like Gauntlet and Body Manipulations, professional cutting artists carve elaborate designs into the skin of their customers, making blood prints of the patterns and collecting them in portfolios (62): Celtic knots, runic and tarot figures, flower buds, even, incongruously, Hello Kitty. Some share tricks of the

trade, like the seasoned pro who eschews the scalpel in favor of a heated knife tip that "cauterizes as it cuts."

None of the erotic ceremonies witnessed by Eurydice involves incapacitating pain or debilitating blood loss. Even the exorbitant spectacle with the needles involves only a small fraction of the pint we are routinely called upon to donate to the Red Cross (66). Still, she explains, these ceremonies carry a visceral power, because the blood "is uncontained and it colors everything." Upon returning from this underworld Eurydice finds herself alternately "enchanted" and "haunted" by her subjects, whose blood continues to color her dreams (111).

What has haunted *me* most about the world captured by Eurydice is how uncannily its basic elements seem to reproduce central motifs from *Light in August*. It is as if the razors, knives, and scalpels, the repeated *public* acts of cutting into and opening the human body, and especially the primal, ubiquitous blood, were lifted straight from the pages of Faulkner's 1932 novel, surely his bloodiest. The echoes are unintentional, of course, but they are significant, especially when we take a moment to reflect further on the strategic value of cutting for the young women and men who participate in blood sports. In an appeal to the reader near the end of her article, Eurydice directly addresses this value: "We all know the impulse to cross the line from the metaphorical into the literal . . . from the outside to the inside" (111). The territory to be recaptured once this line is crossed, or cut, is the body itself, the body appropriated and alienated by metaphor. And the metaphor, in this case, is blood, which has also emerged in popular discourse as one of the leading metaphors for AIDS. Over and over we have been warned that blood can give you AIDS. It must not be spilled. It must not be shared. It must not be uncontained. Blood = AIDS. And as the members of Act Up reminded us throughout the 1980s and 1990s, an anxious national culture was only too ready to conflate AIDS with death. This suggests a third and final equivalence: blood = death.

In this context, cutting functions as an impassioned, politically charged, and wickedly mimetic response to the discourse of AIDS-era America, an attempt to recapture the literal value, the physical presence, and the numinous force of blood from a set of popular metaphors that implicitly and sometimes explicitly equate it with death.[1] Cutting brings about an eruption of the natural into the midst of a discursive field. Materially and pointedly grounded in the body, it reappropriates blood as one's own vital fluid rather than someone else's figure of speech.

The devotees of cutting culture include gays and lesbians. The basic equipment includes syringes and needles. Blood is exchanged and shared. And yet, as Eurydice observes, participants report finding it not only relatively safe but exhilarating. In this way cutting represents an almost point-by-point perfor-

mative rejection of the way AIDS discourse links homosexuality, prostitution, and drug use with virulent social contagion and death. In AIDS America, "blood" creates difference, as if applying Disraeli's formula to sexual orientation, sex work, and chemical dependency rather than to race. Thanks to AIDS and the semantic field that has coalesced around it, "blood" can fashion these categories into sources of deadly alterity that must be quarantined for their, and "our," own good.

In cutting culture, however, blood functions in a dramatically different way. Instead of making difference, it literally makes *noise*, as in the following lesbian encounter recorded by Eurydice:

> The razor breaks the skin. Blood trickles out. The strokes become shorter, quicker, and deeper, like sexual thrusts, until Daddy [the dominant partner] moans, then cuts, with firm precision, small parallel X's from shoulder to shoulder. The rest of us watch and sip our drinks. Some women make out.
>
> Daddy now slashes at random. Blood spurts, painting them pagan. "I open you like no fist can open you," Daddy says in a controlled waspish tone.
>
> As if that were a cue, [her] torn [partner] starts to scream. She screams for mercy, and yet I've never heard such a scream; it is wild and celebratory and it fears the bloodletting may stop. It is the scream of having crossed over to the other side. (62)

This is noise in more than a simple acoustic sense. The young woman's scream makes cybernetic noise as well; it disrupts an information system. It jams the interpretive circuitry, takes one aback. (The attending journalist is certainly taken aback.) Its celebratory intensity resists assimilation into the reigning paradigms of AIDS discourse, where blood, as one young woman remarks, is "a dangerous sport these days" (62), the most dangerous thing going in AIDS America. The scars of Eurydice's subjects point beyond the metaphorical and political liberties our society routinely takes with blood and toward a fuller engagement with the human body in its materiality and urgency. "[I]n a world as blurry as ours," Eurydice observes, "the body remains tangible and personal" (62). The art of blood sports is an art of the literal, forging an affirmative, somatic link between identity and blood. It makes human skin into a canvas for hard-won portraits and self-portraits rather than crudely imposed caricatures.

Here again, it is as if we have never left *Light in August*. As I will demonstrate, cutting surfaces at crucial points in Faulkner's novel as an oppositional practice and trope, a writing (in) blood that is also very much an art of the literal in the cultural context of the early twentieth-century Deep South—a world where, as in a later, AIDS-haunted moment, blood was the most dangerous thing going, the culture's most loaded and coercive metaphor. Only at that time, of course, it was a metaphor for race. Turn-of-the-

century southerners were fond of saying that "blood tells," that race determines character, and breeding always wins out in the end. In *Light in August*, however, where the phrase "blood tells" fails to appear even once, blood is just as likely to make noise, to disturb reigning social fictions rather than to corroborate them. By repeatedly bringing blood to the surface of the human body, cutting in *Light in August* mobilizes the power of literal meaning and the natural world as a rejoinder to the discursive system that puts blood in the service of racial exploitation and violence.

That system, of course, has a history. With all due respect to Disraeli, blood has not always made race, but in a gradual process stretching over several centuries, it came to be understood in the West as the hidden principle and *cause* of racial identity, physiognomy, and behavior. At the risk of oversimplification, I will isolate a few key developments in the intellectual history of race that helped bring blood to the forefront of the Euro-American racial imagination. One was a crucial shift in the semantic field of racial terminology. The others took place in the theoretical field in which racial issues were discussed and debated.[2]

Throughout the Enlightenment period, scientists who engaged in the study and classification of racial groups were generally in agreement that all human beings, whatever their perceived differences, were ultimately of common descent from a single pair of original ancestors created in a single act of divine will. This view, known as monogenism, grounded scientific inquiry in biblical authority. Monogenists typically appealed to environmental factors to account for the racial diversity of the species: the early descendants of Adam and Eve were thought to have migrated to different parts of the globe, forming distinct regional populations that, under the influence of climate, landscape, and available diet, evolved over generations into distinct races. The late eighteenth century saw the rise of a competing view, polygenism, which derived each race from a separate act of creation. Polygenists turned to heredity rather than environment to explain racial difference, assigning each race its own specific line of descent. In their view, the races had not grown apart over time; they had always been different, since each originally sprang from a different pair of progenitors. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, thanks in no small part to the international influence of a newly emergent "American school" of anthropology, polygenic hereditarianism had largely supplanted monogenic environmentalism as the leading scientific account of racial origins and diversity.

This shift helped "blood" acquire a new resonance in the theoretical discourse of race. Under monogenism, which assigned everyone to the same ultimate line of descent, all people would in a very real sense be of common blood. One's blood would simply be one's humanity, one's human descent from Adam and Eve, and blood would thereby be of little use as a specific

racial descriptor singling out distinctive groups. It is only with the advent of polygenism, with the belief that different racial groups are descended from different ancestors, that the sense of blood as entailing a specific heritage, a distinct racial identity, could emerge as viable, and only then that one might speak intelligibly of *mixed* blood, since mixture presupposes recognizably distinct racial "strains" of blood to begin with. Along complementary lines, the shift from environmentalism to hereditarianism was a movement from external causes of racial characteristics toward progenitive causes rooted in the somatic endowment one receives from one's biological ancestors, a movement toward the body, the province of blood, and away from air, water, light, terrain, and temperature. Moreover, under environmentalism, racial differences were by no means to be considered final or absolute, for if the races had diverged as a result of adaptation to living conditions, they could just as easily converge again in the future as a result of the same process; hence the widespread scientific and popular speculation about whether European colonists would darken with prolonged exposure to the tropics, or whether African slaves transported to Northern Europe would eventually grow lighter in color, perhaps within a single life span. For hereditarians, however, race was no accident. It was destiny, an irrevocable legacy handed down from one's remotest progenitors to one's distant posterity. This sense of immutable and perhaps even irreconcilable racial difference could readily attach itself to the semantic content of "blood."

That content was itself changing during the period under consideration. As the French sociologist Colette Guillaumin observes in a pathbreaking 1972 essay, "The Specific Characteristics of Racist Ideology," "There is a subtle trap laid for us by words whose forms do not alter over time, for we tend to ascribe to them with no hesitation the identity of a fixed meaning" (Guillaumin 37). This has been the case with the vocabulary of race, whose apparently stable signifiers have actually undergone a process of "historical drift" over their centuries of use, acquiring new layers of meaning and shedding old ones. At its "permanent semantic core," Guillaumin argues, race conveys nothing more than the idea of a "coherent group of people" (38). But her work with several centuries of French dictionaries suggests that the basis of this coherence was understood very differently by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century speakers than by their modern counterparts.

Prior to 1800, words like "race," "blood," and "inheritance" were used above all in a *juridical* sense, to indicate a legal line of descent. The emphasis was on lineage, family continuity, the power of name in an age of great aristocratic households, where nobility and title were routinely conferred via royal patent or political or ecclesiastical appointment. The language of race was what Guillaumin calls "auto-referential," used by the group in power to signify its own proudly cultivated sense of difference, a difference

presumed to entail superiority, as in "the race of Bourbons," "the blood of kings," and so on. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, this entire semantic field had shifted. The same word forms appeared, but their emphasis was now primarily *biological* rather than juridical. What mattered most was no longer the legal continuity of relatively small, powerful families, but the genetic continuity of vast global populations. Racial terms became "altero-referential," used by the group in power to signify the difference and presumed inferiority of others.[3] There was an increasing use of phrases like "the race of Arabs," "Jewish blood," "inherited Negro features," and so on in the popular and scientific literature of the period. Strictly speaking, one's racial identity was no longer a function of one's ancestors, those who genealogically "go before," but of one's progenitors, those who somatically "beget forth." At about this time, the adjective "black," which had denoted a physical trait in individuals (skin color), began to indicate membership in a hereditary group (the so-called Negro race). Race had become biophysical and absolute.

With these developments, blood could begin to function in racial discourse not only as a descriptor, a way to invoke or even quantify one's lineage, but as a motive force behind the formation and transmission of racial characteristics. Consider the issue of mixed blood. As long as race was understood as lineage and blood as a fundamentally heuristic means of conveying who one is, where one comes from, and what one is entitled to, it made little sense to think of a diverse racial background as involving competing strains of blood that actually come together within the confines of one's body. The concept of blood simply assigned a bodily familiarity and immediacy to what was still intuited as an abstract and disembodied set of legal relations. But with the advent of the biological view, mixed blood came to be seen by many as an embodied state in which discrete bloodlines interact dynamically, with direct consequences for bodily health, personality structure, and psychological well-being. Note that "blood" here captures a sense of race that is no longer an inert quality of the body but an active element at work within it; the heuristic device has acquired an explanatory as well as descriptive power.

This brings us to a third important development in the intellectual history of race, the rise of what Guillaumin calls "endogenous determinism," a concept she discusses in two important essays, "The Idea of Race and Its Elevation to Autonomous Scientific and Legal Status" (1980) and "Race and Nature: The System of Marks" (1977).[4] For centuries, Guillaumin observes, the nature of a thing was understood to be its purpose and place in the world order as fixed by God and subsequently interpreted by theology. But from the Enlightenment forward, the nature of a thing has increasingly come to be viewed as the product of properties internal to the thing itself. Human groups defined as "natural," for instance, groups like the races and

sexes, are assumed to arise from mechanical causes intrinsic to the groups themselves rather than from exogenous forces like God, history, society, or economy. Put simply, such groups exist as a result of their own logic. Guillaumin rightly associates this view with scientific development; the principle of endogenous determinism helped science carve out a disciplinary space for itself, a unique field—the study of autonomous natural principles—that it could call its own.

Guillaumin argues that the modern understanding of race rests on a *somatic* form of endogenous determinism that posits bodily characteristics as the driving force behind human capacities, social relations, and historical events. According to Guillaumin's materialist view, racial groups are the product of specific social relationships that allow the members of each group to be first discerned and then lumped together under some sort of indexical sign or mark. This mark *could* be almost anything—a uniform, a gold star, a tattoo, a brand—as long as it effectively signifies the group's status. Since the eighteenth century, however, it has almost invariably been a permanent morphological feature ascribed to "nature": skin pigmentation, skull size and shape, hair texture, and so on. Social relations, then, create race by means of the mark. Somatic determinism, however, reverses and obscures this materialist logic, making the social relationships (one's access or lack thereof to goods and services, the degree of compensation for one's labor, one's presumed or externally imposed status) into a function of the specific "nature" of the racial group, a racial nature in turn derived from the specific bodily features considered inherent and permanent to every member of the group and characteristic of it, the features collected under the system of marks. According to this "pseudo-materialism" (Guillaumin 143), the mark creates race, and race drives history and society. It is as if race is to be held "naturally" responsible for the social practices that bring it into existence in the first place. "Wherever there is a power relationship," Guillaumin writes, "a somatic trait [will be] found or invented" to serve as the putative basis of a "natural" group that can be dominated due to its "nature" (81).[5]

In the early years of the nineteenth century, as its racial overtones became increasingly biologized, blood emerged as just such a trait. An ideal one, in fact. No longer simply an index of racial identity or a convenient way to inventory mixed ancestry, it began to be written and spoken of as the hidden cause and basis of racial identity. At a time when the social and taxonomic problem of miscegenation made skin color less and less viable as an indicator of race, blood acquired the status of an endogenous principle, whose "miraculous properties," according to critic Mason Stokes, included the "imagined ability to shape and define not only a distinct identity but a specific kind of person" (119). When Immanuel Kant, for instance, declared "the composition of the human blood" to be the "seat" of "innate, natural character"

(qtd. in Poliakov 171), he was not just locating character in blood but actively and much more problematically deriving character from blood. In 1837 a French scientist named Victor Courtet de l'Isle put forward the theory that "human history was determined not merely by interracial struggles, that is to say 'physically,' but also in a more intimate way through a welter of combinations or injections of different bloodstreams, or chemically," which is to say endogenously. According to historian Léon Poliakov, Courtet "seems to have been the first to clothe this idea, which was to become . . . a dogma of modern racism, in scientific language" (Poliakov 228–229).[6] Blood was even elevated to the position of grammatical subject, as in Thomas Dixon's 1902 novel, *The Leopard's Spots*, where an authorial spokesman offers perhaps the supreme statement of endogenous racial determinism in all of American literature: "One drop of blood makes a Negro. It kinks the hair, flattens the nose, thickens the lip, puts out the light of intellect, and lights the fires of brutal passions. . . . There is enough Negro blood here to make mulatto the whole Republic" (244). Here blood is endowed with the power to transform human physique, to benight the mind, to enflame the emotions, to redirect national history and identity, and, most crucially, to create race itself. Blood, then, makes race in two distinct senses: the concept of blood helps to sustain and legitimate the concept of race, and, within that conceptual scheme, blood is understood to be constitutive of race.

So how does blood make race in *Light in August*? And where does Faulkner go from there? Bearing in mind Faulkner's youthful remark about Paul Cézanne, that he painted with a brush dipped in light (see Faulkner, *Selected Letters* 24), it might be apropos to describe *Light in August* as written with a pen dipped in blood. But blood is not only drawn and shed throughout this novel, it is also frequently and consequentially invoked, and invoked not only to handle the taxonomic problem of who or what someone "is," racially speaking, but also to handle what we might call the *motivational* problem of what one's race makes one *do*. On numerous occasions in *Light in August*, blood is held responsible for human behavior. The novel, however, offers its own critique of this view by juxtaposing scenes in which blood is invoked as an endogenous racial principle with scenes of cutting, of actual bloodshed or deliberate bloodletting. By presenting cutting as the result of a racialized discourse, one underwritten by representations of blood and race, such scenes function as a subversive commentary on these representations and the violent cultural work they perform. Once again, summoning the literal, bringing blood itself forward for inspection, becomes a way to short-circuit a destructive metaphor by calling attention to it and its material consequences. With all this in mind, then, I will focus on two narrative sequences from *Light in August* in which Joe Christmas finds himself in flight from the law. The first, which ends in Mottstown, a neighboring community to Faulkner's Jefferson,

takes place over chapters 13–15 and represents a kind of trial run for the second, which takes place in chapter 19, ending on the floor of Gail Hightower's kitchen in Jefferson.

In my analysis of both of these sequences, it is important to foreground the historical problem of African American mobility, which for several centuries made white southerners nervous enough to resort to racialized interpretations (black movement as the expression of endogenous fecklessness and indiscipline) rather than the more obvious and appropriate social interpretations one would expect from natives of a world where African Americans were subjected to regimes of slavery and institutionalized segregation. The history of this problem includes fugitive slaves, freedmen and women on the move in massive numbers during the Jubilee period following Emancipation, and, perhaps most dramatically, the Great Migration of the 1910s and 1920s, in which African Americans moved out of the U.S. South in massive numbers. Against this historical background, Joe's itinerancy renders him problematic from the moment he sets foot in Jefferson. One of the first things noticed about him at the sawmill where he finds employment is his "rootless" appearance (Faulkner, *Light* 31), which should be understood not only as a possible economic problem (how long will he perform his job before wanderlust seizes him again?) but as a definite genealogical problem, an absence of roots that makes racial classification both difficult and *urgent*. As the historian Joel Williamson has written of small-town white southerners in an era of widespread anxiety about miscegenation, "The identification of newcomers in a community was always important to them, but as blackness disappeared beneath white skins and white features, it became vastly more so" (*New People* 103). *Pudd'nhead Wilson* has already introduced us to the social chaos and contradiction that ensue when racial blackness goes into hiding in this way; indeed, Joe Christmas is Faulkner's explicit reworking of Twain's mixed-race antagonist, the figure I came to refer to in chapter 1 as *A*. (As we will see, Faulkner's novel revisits and rewrites Twain's on numerous other levels as well.)[7] Significantly, then, racial anxiety pervades even the earliest spoken exchanges concerning Joe Christmas:

> The foreman and the superintendent were talking at the door. They parted and the foreman returned. "His name is Christmas," he said.
>
> "His name is what?" one said.
>
> "Christmas."
>
> "Is he a foreigner?"
>
> "Did you ever hear of a white man named Christmas," the foreman said.
>
> "I never heard of nobody a-tall named it," the other said. (Faulkner, *Light* 33)

The name Christmas only compounds the problem of Joe's rootlessness. Insofar as the town is unable to identify anyone else "a-tall" who has ever

gone by "Christmas," the name seems to present an identity independent of lineage, as if derived from the mere circumstance of a holiday, or the time of year associated with it—much as Roxana's slave child in *Pudd'nhead*, Valet de Chambre, or "Chambers," is named for a location (in which he will be expected to provide service) rather than after a father. And indeed, the reader will learn that Joe has passionately rejected a name, McEachern, that entailed both a line of descent and a juridical identity as an adopted son in favor of one that gives no hint of legal or biological ancestry (145, 184). It is as if from the very beginning he disavows the category of lineal blood.

These associations will problematize Joe all over again when, in the wake of Joanna Burden's death and after three years of almost sedentary existence in Jefferson, he begins to move again, to run. Once Lucas Burch plants the seeds of racial suspicion in the white community (97–98), Joe's enigmatic history and the social history of black movement in the region will be enlisted in this process of racialization. The farther Joe runs, the blacker he will get, the more easily he will be consigned to the black race, whatever truths his body might seem to offer to the contrary. The fact that he runs and the *way* that he runs pose interpretive problems for the white community: why does he neither escape nor surrender nor get caught but uncannily circulate, hover? This behavior threatens conventional racial categories, but the community will obstinately resolve the crisis by drawing on received stereotypes about black flight and invoking the racialized metaphor of blood as a momentary stay against category confusion.

For the people of Mottstown, the problem is that Joe went walking up and down the main street until somebody recognized him; that "[h]e never denied" who he was (in other words, he didn't lie about it, the way Mottstown thinks "a nigger" would); that "[h]e never did anything" when confronted by his captor, Halliday (he didn't try to escape, the way Mottstown thinks "a nigger" would); that "it looked like he had set out to get himself caught" (347, 349–350). The solution, the inevitable conclusion, is that "it must have been the nigger blood in him" that endogenously *caused* such baffling, perverse, outrageous conduct (349). Here blood emerges as the somatic characteristic that creates, fixes, and naturalizes race so that the latter can be invoked to explain anything and everything. Even though by rights "a nigger" ought to be a fugitive, "ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running" (350), and even though, according to one of Mottstown's anonymous narrators, Joe "don't look any more like a nigger than I do" (349), still it must have been that Negro blood. The verdict echoes the earlier remark made by Hightower's grocer—"Why, the fool never even had sense enough to get out of the county. . . . Show he is a nigger, even if nothing else" (309)—but with the additional intervention of blood as the mark and source of that obstinate racial identity.

It is probably no coincidence, then, that the one thing Joe can do that will be recognized by the Mottstown community as unambiguously, categorically Negro, is to bleed, to receive violence and acquiesce to the cutting of his body. In the words of one witness, Halliday "had already hit the nigger a couple of times in the face, and the nigger acting like a nigger for the first time and taking it, not saying anything: just bleeding sullen and quiet" (350). Faulkner's point here is surely that Joe's bleeding face could and should unleash a certain demystifying potential at work in the literal fact of blood, that by helping to fashion Joe as the fugitive Negro who has eluded and mocked the white community for the better part of a week, the figure of "blood" has led directly to the very real blood that runs down Joe's face. A racial representation has sponsored material violence. An idea has come face-to-face, if you will, with its consequence. Mottstown, however, is unable to see Joe's blood in this literal, humanizing, and critical way. The racial discourse of the white community is so powerful that even red blood can be reinscribed within race, by making "bleeding" and "taking it" into the acts of a Negro. What Mottstown sees is not the blood of a man who has been discursively constructed as a Negro, it sees the blood of a man who *is* a Negro—as evidenced by his sullen, quiet bleeding.

This perfectly circular reasoning conceals a further irony: if *being cut* makes Joe black in Mottstown, *cutting* has made him black in Jefferson, where his alleged identity as the razor-wielding murderer of a white woman has already advanced him several steps toward the social category of Negro.[8] Similarly, if cutting has helped make Halliday white in Mottstown, confirming his status as a representative of a white community outraged and taunted by a fugitive black killer, being cut has helped make Joanna Burden white in Jefferson, since it is only when she is discovered to be the victim of putatively black, and putatively sexual, violence that the white community seems to recognize her as a white woman living alone among Negroes. Before the murder, by contrast, "[n]one of them had ever entered the house. While she was alive they would not have allowed their wives to call on her. When they were younger, children (some of their fathers had done it too) they had called after her on the street, 'Nigger lover! Nigger lover!'" (291–292). The list of permutations is complete: black and bleeding (Joe), white and bleeding (Joanna), black and cutting (Joe), white and cutting (Halliday). Bleeding quietly from the face, then, can only be evidence of race by confirming preexisting racial suspicions. *Any* sign can be seized upon as the mark of race, as proof of blackness; a sign, Umberto Eco has famously noted, is anything that can be used to lie (7). No matter what Joe does—if he runs or if he is caught, if he cuts or if he bleeds—he will "therefore" be black.

What to make, then, of the fact that Joe is already bleeding from the face, marked by blood, *before* he presents himself for capture in Mottstown?

And bleeding, moreover, by his own hand? On the morning of his final day of flight, he kneels beside a spring and "shaves, after a fashion. His hand trembles; it is not a very good job, and he cuts himself three or four times, stanching the blood with the cold water until it stops." He then goes to stand beside the road, "his gaunt face blotched with patches of stubble and with dried blood," as he awaits the wagon that will take him to civilization and capture (Faulkner, *Light* 336). I want to suggest that Joe's self-cutting in this scene is not entirely accidental, that it is as much a part of the ritual preparation for capture (and for the ordeal that will inevitably follow capture) as the acts of ablution and shaving. The (perhaps Freudian) slips with the razor transform Joe's morning toilet into a scarification rite, a stylization of the body that brings blood to its surface as if in anticipation of its expropriation as racial metaphor in the discourse of Mottstown. Released or perhaps unleashed by his shaky hand, Joe's blood signals his human embodiment and vulnerability, all the more so by making his body prefigure the beating he will receive in Mottstown, a beating underwritten by the discourse of blood. By tattooing himself in this way, Joe fashions his body into a somatic text that is already speaking back to that discourse, interfering with Mottstown's racial information system. He makes noise. Mottstown, of course, will be able to answer the challenge of this clamorous blood, but the fact that Joe's razor scars will soon be covered over by fresh blood and new marks should not be taken as a sign of futility or failure, for it also confirms the basic accuracy of the prediction he has carved into his face at the spring.

Chapter 19 takes these problems, strategies, and resistances and elevates them to frantic intensity. Here the discourse of blood grows more eloquent, coherent, and urgent, because here there is more horror to account for, more violence to legitimate than ever before. Here also the novel's artistry in blood reaches a new level of oppositional force, as literal meaning grows harder and harder to foreclose or neutralize. Blood becomes at once more sovereign in its grip on race and noisier in its dissonance than anywhere else in the text, as demonstrated by the chapter's three defining moments: Percy Grimm's pursuit of Joe Christmas; Gavin Stevens's speculations on Joe's death; and the death scene itself in Hightower's kitchen. Once again, a great deal will be riding on the relationship between running and race, and on the part blood plays in articulating that relationship.

Percy Grimm appears wildly inconsistent in chapter 19, savagely running down, killing, and mutilating the very man whose constitutional rights he has set out to protect. But what consistently motivates Grimm as he passes from peacekeeping to butchery is the logic of 1920s U.S. nativism, the same belief system behind the xenophobic immigration restrictions voted into law by Congress in 1924. Throughout the entire macabre sequence in which he figures, Grimm's primary responsibility is to his country; he is, after all, a

member of the *National* Guard.[9] America is his first and truest love; his initiation into manhood occurs in a fistfight with a disillusioned World War I veteran who questions the value and wisdom of patriotic loyalty (450). But it is a particular idea of America that Grimm reveres, one defined by the nativism of the times: in his "belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races" (451), we can see the convergence of national pride and race pride. Grimm's United States is a racial republic, organized not around the inalienable political rights of an Enlightenment subject but instead around white solidarity and supremacy, as if the state itself has followed Guillaumin's path from the juridical to the biological. For Grimm, then, to guard the nation is to guard the white race.

According to this way of thinking, to protect the fundamentally American right to due process is to ensure the freedom, equality, and security of whites under a thoroughly racialized national order. By extension, for Joe to allow himself to be guarded amounts to accepting the rights of a white man. He certainly *looks* white after all (or to echo the Mottstown native quoted earlier, he doesn't look any more like a black man than I do), and as long as he agrees to *act* white, to accept the constitutional protection afforded to all whites under Grimm's nativist interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, guarding America (or as Grimm likes to put it, "preserv[ing] order," "let[ting] the law take its course") will entail guarding Joe. Thus due process can be racialized even in being extended to a suspected mulatto (see 451–452).

For Joe to break and run, though, is to topple this ideological house of cards. The farther he runs from the protection Grimm offers, the blacker he will get; the blacker he gets, the more dangerous he will become; and the more dangerous he becomes, the more violence against him will be justified in the name of preempting the violence expected from him. We are witnessing the transformation of a racially ambiguous figure from presumptively white to presumptively black. Joe gets blacker not only because his escape once again conjures up the troubling historical image of black movement and flight, but also because in disturbing the public order and rejecting the protection of the law, he now threatens the precious national community so jealously guarded by Grimm. Precious and racialized: for in threatening Grimm's America, Joe by extension threatens the white race. And in threatening the white race, he becomes a Negro, as Grimm will confirm with his parting shot to Joe, "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell" (464). Put simply, to be un-American is to be black. Note that this racial reasoning is largely if not completely independent of the so-called one-drop rule, which categorizes all mulattoes as Negroes. For Grimm, it is Joe's threatening behavior rather than his ostensibly mixed ancestry that racializes him. Indeed, one suspects that anyone who posed a similar threat to Grimm's racial republic would be similarly "blackened."[10]

A materialist analysis of the sort practiced by Guillaumin suggests that here as in the earlier escape sequence the act of running makes Joe black: the social event becomes the occasion for the projection onto Joe of a naturalized racial identity, an identity that can then be invoked to explain the event. This logical trap ultimately relocates Joe outside Grimm's definition of national membership, transforming him into exactly what Grimm must guard *against*. Once Joe no longer accepts the protection of the law, the law and the nation must be protected from him. This is how the man whose mission was to keep Joe from getting lynched can wind up single-handedly lynching Joe himself.

In the aftermath of Joe's death, Gavin Stevens performs a kind of ideological mopping-up operation for white Jefferson. As evening settles upon the exhausted and perplexed town, Stevens steps forward to supply the endogenous somatic mark from which Joe's enigmatic identity and equally enigmatic behavior can be derived. That mark, once again, is blood. The intervention of blood, and the enormous explanatory power Stevens assigns to it, will allow him to reverse the hidden logic of Grimm's about-face—that Joe is black because he runs—and to suggest instead that Joe runs because he is black, that his "black blood" makes him run. I find it suggestive that the most articulate, deterministic, and fully biologized theory of blood put forward in the novel is the work of a blue blood, a member of the patrician class whose "ancestors owned slaves" in Jefferson (444), though I suppose it's unfair, given the thrust of my argument, to make Stevens accountable for the behavior of his progenitors. Sophisticated, highly educated, and professionally trained, Stevens will put physical anthropology to work in service of criminal psychology with the same enthusiasm and complete lack of irony exhibited by nineteenth-century criminologists like Italy's Cesare Lombroso, England's Francis Galton, and Missouri's own David Wilson:

> [T]here was too much running with him, stride for stride with him. . . . It was not alone all those thirty years . . . but all those successions of thirty years before that which had put that stain either on his white blood or his black blood, whichever you will, and which killed him. But he must have run with believing for a while; anyway, with hope. But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it. It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself. Because the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it. And it was the white blood which sent him to the minister, which rising in him for the last and final time, sent him against all reason and all reality, into the embrace of a chimera, a blind faith in something read in a printed Book. Then I believe that the white blood deserted him for a moment. Just a second, a flicker, allowing the black to rise in its final moment and make him turn upon that on which he had postulated his hope of salvation. It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man. . . . And then

> the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life. He did not kill the minister. He merely struck him with the pistol and ran on and crouched behind that table and defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years. He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand. (448–449)

Assigning this analysis explicitly to a lawyer may be Faulkner's way of acknowledging the key historical role played by miscegenation law in "underwriting the modern institutionalization of blood and race" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Saks 45). Compare another lawyer's account of the gyrations in racial and social identity lived out by the unfortunate changelings of Dawson's Landing, who also oscillate, though at a slower pace, between black and white roles: "*A* was put into *B*'s cradle in the nursery; *B* was transferred to the kitchen, and became a negro and slave . . . but within a quarter of an hour he will stand before you, white and free! . . . From seven months onward until now, *A* has still been a usurper, and in my finger-records he bears *B*'s name" (Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 112). But where David Wilson's *A* is exposed and undone by his hand, Stevens's Joe succumbs to an even more treacherous bodily attribute, one, moreover, that remains internal to and constitutive of identity, not simply, like the hand, expressive or symptomatic of it.

In Stevens's tour de force of endogenous racial determinism, the word "blood" appears twelve times, evoking a complex, hybrid ancestry but also a causal principle actively at work in Joe, prompting instantaneous modulations of behavior that lead to outright contradictions and paralyzing impasses. Like Thomas Dixon, whom one suspects he has read, Stevens installs the word "blood" in the grammatical subject position. Blood drives, it snatches, it prevents, it deserts, it rises, it sweeps, and in the end, it devastatingly fails. To deny this sovereign force is fatal, spelling mutilation and death. It amounts to going against nature.

Stevens fashions an image of the mulatto not as a vigorous, hardy alloy of bloodlines but as a degenerate mongrel, a self-canceling patchwork of antagonistic strains, an *interior* changeling, pulled this way and that in a terrible tug-of-war that extends beyond the rarefied plane of consciousness to the concrete movements and gestures of the body itself.[11] The tragedy of Stevens's mulatto is not social, the ostracism of an individual denied membership in any human community, but somatic, a matter of the organism's own grotesque rejection of itself on the physical level.[12] Stevens thus does *Pudd'nhead Wilson* one better, intimating that a man's own blood—and not, as Twain wrote, his hand—can be his deadliest enemy, equating mixed ancestry with something very like leukemia (see Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 52). This view conveniently transfers the responsibility for Joe's death from Grimm, where it rightly belongs, to Joe himself, whose blood, after all, failed him. In-

voking blood in this way allows Stevens to mystify Grimm's patriotic racism, suture over his hysterical violence, and excuse the white community for its part in that violence.

Which brings us to the butcher knife, the homely descendant of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*'s exotic Indian dagger, doing yeoman's service in a Mississippi kitchen until Grimm bursts onto the scene to initiate a hideous, homoerotic form of blood sport between himself and Joe. If Grimm and Jefferson would no doubt explain that Joe must be cut and castrated *because* he is black (that is, because he could never be trusted to "let white women alone" otherwise), it seems to me that Joe must be marked in this way—precisely in Guillaumin's sense—*in order* to be black. The act of cutting contributes further to the fabrication, imposition, and perpetuation of a racial identity understood in ontological terms. The blood released from Joe's body, then, like that released earlier by Halliday's fists, is intended to help stage and construct race.[13] Grimm turns to blood in much the same way that the nineteenth-century advocates of manual discourse whom I discussed in chapter 1 turned to the hand: to fix identity (including racial identity), stabilize meaning (including racial meaning), and reinstate order (including racial order) in a modern world whose dynamic social transformations were synonymous in the conservative imagination with crisis. Grimm's project, however, backfires, as the explosive emergence of Joe's blood overloads the racial circuitry and ultimately turns the power of blood *against* the guardsman: "For a long moment [Joe] looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever" (464–465). The scene thus restages *A*'s ostensible racial "confess[ion]" on the courtroom floor in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (113).

But everything hinges here on the way Faulkner simultaneously alludes to and renounces racial metaphor in coloring Joe's blood black. The visual effect is not unlike that achieved by Hollywood directors of the black-and-white era who used chocolate syrup for screen blood. The reader is meant to see not an authorial confirmation of Stevens's racial theories, whose discourse the passage cunningly echoes, but instead the literal and material phenomenon of blood: the thick, dark, viscous, deoxygenated fluid issuing from the massive, violently opened veins that run along the inside of the thighs and loins.[14] The rupture of the body brings the rupture of metaphor. The man on the floor is not black; if anything, he is quite pale. Rather, the *blood* is black, on an immediate perceptual level; and the horror of this realization—that a racial trope like "black blood" has helped make this real, dark blood flow—

unsettles the white community's complacent racial thinking. The rhetorical effect is the exact opposite of the way an originally forced figure of speech, or catachresis, comes to acquire a familiar value over time, as in a phrase like "the legs of a table," which has gradually lost its ability to startle. Here, however, in a process we might call defiguration, it is as if we suddenly beheld a tabletop resting on four fleshy human legs; it is the restoration of literal meaning to the long-familiar figure of "black blood" that startles, forcing us to confront rather than evade the material body. As that body leaks blood, "blood" leaks as well; the solidity and cohesion of the cultural concept are shaken with the return of the literal and the somatic.

Volatile as rocket fuel, the released black blood mesmerizes everyone in its presence. Joe now incarnates the relationship between representation and violence. He has become an artist in blood, with his own body, and Hightower's floor, for a canvas. The black blast of his blood assaults the spectators, rocking them with its visceral impact: "They are not to lose it," Faulkner writes, even as the horror of the moment recedes. "It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful" (*Light* 465). Even more than the man, the blood is what Jefferson will remember, blood that is only blood, that doesn't stand for anything in an analogical relationship but stands only in contiguity to the violence that released it. "[O]f itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant," it signifies nothing other than itself in its unassimilable excess. Once again we have witnessed the eruption of the natural world into a metaphorical field.

The reemergence of the screaming fire alarm at the scene's end, "mount[ing] toward its unbelievable crescendo" before "passing out of the realm of hearing" (465), should remind us, in a characteristically Faulknerian way, that we have *not* been hearing it for quite a while now, for the entire period, in fact, that Joe has lain bleeding in Hightower's kitchen. The temporary absence of that sonic assault, which has functioned throughout the chase scene to elevate readerly and communal tension, offers further evidence of the noise generated by Joe's blood, its ability to crowd even the siren out of narrative consciousness and to wrestle attention to itself. "Rush," "rocket," and "blast," all evocatively noisy words, contribute to the effect. If chapter 19 confirms Thomas Dixon's claim that "[i]t is possible to kill the human body with an idea" (340), it also illustrates how in its dying throes the body can speak back to the idea that killed it, can make plain, in the medium of its own blood, the terrible consequences of representation and thereby clear a preliminary space for its resistance.

Such resistance is already at work in the castration scene, in the specific and entirely appropriate form of physical revulsion. "When the others reached the kitchen they saw the table flung aside now and Grimm stooping over the body. . . . [W]hen they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men

gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit" (464). More than any other aspect of the scene, the nausea of this nameless weekend warrior explicitly confirms that the eruption of the literal has reached an audience alert to its significance on at least a visceral level and perhaps on a more conscious intellectual level as well. All around this man, words are turning into unspeakable acts and things. "Blood" is made real. "Lynching" is no longer something you only hear about. This is what "castration" looks like.[15] Nausea signals how drastically this process of literalization raises the stakes of the scene. In its near-speaking of the unspeakable, and in its complicated mimicry of Joe's bleeding (the body turned inside out, its internal fluids rocketing into the social world), it offers the text's most forceful commentary on Grimm's attempt to liquidate Joe, to reduce him to fluid and pulp as Stevens will later reduce him to "blood." Nausea here makes noise in its own right, bursting onto the scene of cutting as proof that Grimm's racial violence is not going over without a hitch, that there are limits to what he can get away with in the name of the racial republic, since even his cronies are confused and sickened by what he does. We might even say that in its very form, its undifferentiated mixture of the unassimilated elements of digestion, materials that have not been or cannot be properly absorbed, vomit directly suggests noise: nausea is to the body what noise is to the intellect and its regimes of information. In this sense the man's nausea would simply *be* the noise that Joe's blood and Grimm's violence have generated.

Long before the Grand Guignol of chapter 19, however, *Light in August* has already linked nausea, blood, and pervasive anxiety about human difference. Except in that instance, the context is gender rather than race. This other context raises some interesting problems I will address briefly before concluding.

From the moment Joe hears his first adolescent rumors about menstruation, female blood interferes with his still incipient sense of the "smooth and superior shape" of a woman's body and desire. Not even the crude form of therapy he attempts by shooting a sheep and bathing his hands in its blood as it dies (185)—yet another immersion in the literal that suggests blood sports—can reconcile Joe to the red blood of women. Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray has noted the simultaneously constitutive and repressed role played by women's blood in the patriarchal societies and phallocentric epistemologies of the West. With its links to the intrauterine matrix that gives life to every human being, the red blood of "[w]oman, virgin and mother, represents the blood resources" that in the most literal and immediate sense make intellectual reflection and speculation possible (Irigaray, *Speculum* 125). "This natural source of profit—acknowledged as such in 'prehistory' when the value of blood was recognized and exalted above all else—is denied, censored in favor of other goods and powers when patriarchy is established,"

as society comes to "depend upon a refusal to recognize the value of blood" (126), a refusal that renders any "effusion" of this precious fluid "taboo." Even "in the intimacy of the house, the privacy of the home," writes Irigaray, "woman will hide away everything associated with blood" (126). Through the legerdemain of patriarchy, an indispensable material asset gets shifted to the cultural debit column.

Here too, then, blood proves vulnerable to discursive expropriation. The fact that women bleed has been invoked through the ages as a social, political, or legal justification for their subordination, disempowerment, and relegation to second-class status. Red blood makes women weak rather than strong, fluid rather than solid and substantial, mutable rather than dependable, physical rather than spiritual, natural rather than cultural; monthly bleeding confines them to the home, reduces them to their bodies, renders them alien and uncanny in the eyes of many men (see also Irigaray, *This Sex* 75–76, 151, 185–186; J. Delaney et al. 7–66, 107–158; Eisenstein 83; Ortner; Yaeger, "Language" 20).

Joe Christmas is one such man, equating menstrual blood with "periodical filth" (Faulkner, *Light* 185). Yet such filth is incompatible with his idea of *his* woman: "All right," he thinks. "It is so, then. But not to me. Not in my life and my love" (186; emphasis removed). Thus when his first lover, Bobbie Allen, turns up "sick" on the night their relationship is to be consummated, Joe, upon learning what explicitly ails her, reacts hysterically, knocking her down and running away to the woods where, faced with his misogynistic vision of leaking urns, he vomits (188–189).

Nor do things get any better when Joe confronts the *cessation* of menstrual blood in a new lover, Joanna Burden. Intuiting the problem to be menopause rather than pregnancy, he lashes out with physical and verbal violence, bloodying Joanna's face as he pronounces her "worn out" and "not any good anymore" (277–278). This view of menopause as the end of sexuality and desirability reveals the vicious double standard at work in Joe's projections onto the feminine: a woman who bleeds is filthy, sickening, but a woman who no longer bleeds is used up, and a woman who is used up can be beaten, made to bleed. Either way, this personal mythology of gender makes a woman's identity and value revolve around blood. But in drawing Joanna's blood, in making his hand an instrument of cutting, Joe unleashes the same unpredictable force of the literal and the somatic that Grimm does in the castration scene. There, as we have already seen, Grimm tries to use blood to construct an object of contempt that invites the violence directed against it, but blood gets away from him, subverting his design and ultimately exposing his brutality. One could argue that something similar happens here: like Joe's bleeding face in chapter 15 and his bleeding loins in chapter 19, Joanna's bleeding mouth embodies and exposes the relationship between repre-

sentation and violence, eliciting the contradiction at work in Joe's cruelty: she must bleed because she no longer bleeds.

Here are the rudiments of an art of the literal in which blood makes noise for southern discourses of gender. This art, however, never quite emerges in full in Faulkner's novel. To me, this is one of the great squandered opportunities of *Light in August*: the subversive potential of a woman's blood, its power to unsettle pernicious representations of gender, never receives anywhere near the attention that Faulkner brings to his detailed analysis of blood and race. Though female blood is an almost constant preoccupation in the novel, it is almost never directly represented in the narrative. Joanna's bleeding face is a rare exception. More typical are three other scenes involving the traumatic rupture of a woman's body: the murder of Joanna Burden, the birth of Lena Grove's son, and Gail Hightower's unsuccessful attempt to deliver a Negro baby. All are scenes of cutting in which a straight razor is present and presumably in use. And all three presumably involve significant amounts of blood. Yet blood is almost completely absent from the narrative depiction of these scenes.[16] Joanna's blood, for instance, simply vanishes into the textual aporia that surrounds her death, reemerging only much later at the crime scene, in a single offhand reference (289). And Lena's puerperal blood is never mentioned at all. This reticence is especially striking when contrasted with the voyeurism of chapter 19, which all but wallows in Joe's blood.

What is equally striking is that Faulkner does stage Lena's childbed as a vivid rejoinder to the highly conventional image of womanhood held by Byron Bunch, an image whose romantic excesses are amusing at times but also capable of real harm. It is typical of Byron's colossal innocence that when Lena's time comes, he cannot even think of the word "midwife" (393), so committed is he to the idea of her "physical inviolability" and purity (49). To put it mildly, this man is in denial. His idealization of Lena leaves him unable to see that her body and desire have a specific history, and that it is to this history rather than to his personal fantasy that they now answer. He has never arranged for a doctor to assist Lena in birth because, as he will later acknowledge and despite all the conspicuous evidence to the contrary, he has never believed that he would need one, nor has he believed that she is not a virgin (398, 401). This fantasy persists even as Lena's labor begins. "[H]e expected to see her sitting up; perhaps to be met by her at the door, placid, unchanged, timeless." What he encounters instead is an object lesson in Lena's mutability and pain that not even he can deny. We might expect blood to deliver this lesson, rushing out of Lena's laboring body to signal her travail in yet another demystifying eruption of the somatic. Anyone who has ever been present at a childbirth knows that the event is accompanied by a significant amount of blood. But here, perhaps following Byron's own modest gaze, there is a displacement upward, toward Lena's "bloodless mouth,"

a mouth, however, whose "wailing cry in a tongue unknown to man" directly evokes the history that has marked Lena's body and hurts it still. Hearing that wail, Byron can finally recognize the full extent of his negligence, the part his willful repression of Lena's sexuality and pregnancy has played in her present suffering. A woman finally emerges in flesh and blood from his projections. If, as so many feminist scholars have argued, the representation of white womanhood as ideal, virginal, and pedestaled has caused real southern women real pain, Lena's cry and, later, the cry of her baby speak back to those cultural fictions in a language of pain and need.[17] This is why it is not merely tautological to say that Lena's wail makes noise. It disrupts—felicitously—Byron's deeply flawed information system about sex and gender.

Why, then, at this moment, does Faulkner's art of the literal abandon blood in favor of voice? Why must *Light in August* look away from the red blood of women?[18] One answer I can suggest is not exactly flattering to Faulkner, though that may not make it wrong either. It may be that Faulkner minimizes the material presence of blood in the novel's scenes of birth, menstruation, and sexualized male-on-female violence in order to appropriate their power for Joe's death scene, as if the blood that rushes out of Joe has been *textually* as well as physically pent, channeled from the bodies of Lena, Bobbie, and Joanna into the unforgettable eruption of chapter 19, a return of the repressed if ever there was one. I am suggesting, then, that Joe's death may acquire its climactic force in large part by engulfing the resonance of these earlier sequences and their unseen but implicitly present, forceful, and unruly blood. This resonance includes a gendered dimension. I have elsewhere described the castration scene as a failed attempt by Grimm to contain the uncanny masculine excess of Christmas by forcibly refiguring his body as female.[19] Joe's blood thus marks the violence that attends the construction of sex and gender as well as the construction of race. So with the vomiting man to prompt us, we can perhaps see in Joe's resexed and visibly bleeding genitals an image of the nauseating menstruation that we did not see when it was Bobbie Allen who bled.[20] Similarly, in the bloody slashing of Joe's body we witness the murder-by-cutting that went unnarrated when Joanna Burden was its victim. And it may even be that in the violent opening of Joe's loins, and the sudden emergence of their precious contents onto a scene forever altered by that arrival, we are meant to recognize a visual echo of still another image we have never seen directly in *Light in August*, the image of a woman giving birth. If so, if Joe's death scene has absorbed the power of Lena's birth scene (and perhaps Milly Hines's birth scene as well; 378–379), then Grimm's cutting has ironically mutated into obstetrical work, an episiotomy expediting delivery of the burden that Joe, like Lena, has entered the narrative already gestating. But where Lena gives birth to the literal in the form of another human life, Joe's burden—the only legacy he will ever leave—takes

the material form of his pent black blood. That blood does not simply attend what is born, it *is* what is born, what will carry Joe's name forward into communal life and memory in the same way that a child could.

Faulkner did not invent the art of the literal, the writing (in) blood, that I have here called defiguration. The South's obsession with the subject and trope of blood often led its writers to experiment with scenes of bloodshed and bloodletting. Consider the pivotal role, for instance, played by the bloody scourging of Frederick Douglass's Aunt Hester in the opening chapter of his 1845 *Narrative*, another episode that mimics a birth scene, as the slave child is delivered through its "blood-stained gate" (15) into a first full awareness of the ontology of social death that attends the condition of slavery—and also an episode whose bloody excesses are accompanied by the "heart-rending shrieks" (14) of the slave woman. This sonic excess has been nominated by critic Fred Moten as an inaugural performance in the long cultural tradition of radical African American sounding whose elemental "freedom drive" resonates through the histories of blues, jazz, bop, beat, and beyond (7). As taken up by Douglass slave blood joins slave voice in making noise within a scene of racial subjection.[21] Or, closer to Faulkner's own era, we can turn to the example of Edna Ferber's novel *Show Boat*, in which a white man circumvents miscegenation law by cutting the hand of his mulatto wife and sucking her blood, an act that allows him to claim that the couple's marriage is legitimate because he, too, is now of "mixed blood." With its clever defiguration of the racial metaphor, this loving version of blood sport proves effective, keeping at bay the sheriff who has come to arrest the wife.[22]

Light in August, of course, can offer no equivalent to such unqualified success, only a series of Pyrrhic victories in which the subversive potential of cutting and defiguration goes largely unrecognized among the characters but remains for the reader to contemplate. All the same, Faulkner's use of this strategy remains particularly meaningful, the stakes particularly high, given his decision to make racial identity so radically uncertain and circumstantial in Joe's case. Since the narrative finally offers no "firm" or "factual" basis for it, Joe's race can *only* be a matter of representation, even for him. He may be (part) black, he may not; no one, including the reader, will ever know for sure.[23] With the issue of Joe's racial identity pointedly unresolved, Faulkner isolates discourse—the rumors and theories circulated by a community all too eager to read from a glance, a remark, or a gesture to race—as the ultimate ground of the novel's pervasive racial violence: but for the power of metaphors like "black blood," the blood and vomit of *Light in August* might never have flowed.[24] "Race does not exist," writes Guillaumin. "But it does kill people" (107). *Light in August*'s artistry in blood drives that point home with a vengeance, recording the hard facts that attend the South's defining social fiction.

CHAPTER FOUR

Richard Wright's Parables of Pain

Uncle Tom's Children *and the Making and Unmaking of a Southern Black World*

> Some of the stories I found physically painful to read,
> even though I admired them.
> —Malcolm Cowley

> It was not *color*, but *crime*, not *God*, but *man*, that afforded the true explanation of the existence of slavery, nor was I long in finding out another important truth, viz: what man can make man can unmake.
> —Frederick Douglass

A century ago, W. E. B. Du Bois took the historical, cultural, and ontological predicament of African American sorrow and made it the basis of a theory of black soul. This theory, which drew in roughly equal parts on the world-historical *geist* of Hegelian idealism and the animistic emphasis of West African spiritual systems, posited blackness as a distinct culture and consciousness formed by the accumulated weight of human misery across generations of diaspora, enslavement, rape, lynching, disfranchisement, economic exploitation, and institutionalized inequality, and by the collaborative expressive response to that legacy of alienation and suffering. Nowhere was that response, with its elements of mourning, commemoration, resistance, resilience, and the double-voiced discourse now recognized as signifyin(g), better exemplified for Du Bois than in the antebellum spirituals sung by African American slaves and their descendants. In the sorrow songs, as Du Bois called them, the souls of black folk achieved paradigmatic expressive form.

In his first published book, the story collection *Uncle Tom's Children*, Richard Wright revises Du Bois's account of sorrow as the ground of black being, reformulating it into an exhaustive, excruciating analysis of physical pain, sheer bodily distress and trauma, as the defining condition of African American existence in the U.S. South. Wright's sorrow songs, or what Ralph Ellison would later call Wright's blues, are above all fables of embodi-

ment, of southern black bodies in pain. Paul Gilroy has observed of diasporic cultures on both sides of the black Atlantic that the experience of being propelled into modernity creates an "ontological state" that Gilroy terms "the condition of being in pain," a condition accompanied by unique "enregistration[s]" of time, language, and reality (203). Like Wright's work generally but in an even more explicit and literal way, *Uncle Tom's Children* is at once an anatomy of and a guidebook to the black condition of being in pain, pursuing the equivalent in fiction and memoir of what Elaine Scarry would achieve a half-century later in her monumental philosophical study, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. As I hope to demonstrate, Wright's work anticipates, almost uncannily at times, all of Scarry's central insights into pain and human embodiment: the fundamental structure of pain in its terrible privacy, ineffability, and aversiveness; the destructive or, more precisely, deconstructive impact of pain on thought, voice, and world; the relation between embodiment and power as revealed in the limit cases of torture, war, and commodity fetishism; the functional antagonism of tool and weapon as material artifacts; the fundamental relationship linking pain, imagination, and material culture; and the heuristic value of Judeo-Christian scripture and the writings of Karl Marx as allegories of this relationship and ethical commentaries on its deformation and abuse.

Wright, however, ultimately goes further than Scarry. The embeddedness—I am tempted to say the entrapment—of his characters in the specific histories and cultures of the Jim Crow South, an embeddedness Wright never attempts to elevate into the predicament of a universalized philosophical subject, allows him to challenge and complicate Scarry's account of the primordial human energies she calls making and unmaking, along with the ethical calculus she develops in linking them. Specifically, what is in Scarry "the" body in pain, a raceless, genderless, theoretical construct, is in Wright always an African American body. This is not to say that white bodies are absent from the textual world of *Uncle Tom's Children*, or that they fare at all well there. Indeed, so harsh and violent is the Jim Crow landscape of Wright's collection that numerous whites endure hunger, beatings, and shootings right alongside their unacknowledged black brethren. But their pain, the affective, sentient dimension of their injury and trauma, rarely if ever surfaces to achieve textual representation. Instead, pain remains almost entirely the province of black subjects, at once a devastating burden and, paradoxically, a gateway to emancipatory possibilities of personal and collective transformation and resistance, possibilities largely undreamt of in Scarry's philosophy.

As originally published by Harper's in 1938, *Uncle Tom's Children* contained four long stories: "Big Boy Leaves Home" (first published in November 1936 in the *New Caravan*), "Down by the Riverside," "Long Black Song," and "Fire and Cloud" (which also appeared in *Story* magazine in March

1938, nearly simultaneously with the appearance of the collection, and went on to take second prize in the O. Henry Memorial Award story competition in 1939). Riding on the enormous sales of Wright's novel *Native Son*, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1940, Harper's brought out an expanded edition of *Uncle Tom's Children* the same year. Two new texts now bookended the original four: an early foray into memoir, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow: An Autobiographical Sketch," originally published in 1937 in *American Stuff*, a collection of works by members of the Federal Writers Project; and another long tale, "Bright and Morning Star," first published in *New Masses* in May 1938.[1] The additions make a significant contribution to the analysis of black pain already under way in the 1938 edition, allowing Wright not only to develop but also to legitimate his earlier fictions. Accordingly, the expanded edition of 1940 will be the focus of my discussion here, starting with the narrative most responsible for situating and authenticating the volume as a whole.

The Pedagogy of Pain: "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow"

As an exercise in life writing, "Ethics" could appear to strike a dissonant note in a collection otherwise devoted to fiction. Yet its purpose as nonfiction, and more precisely as autobiography, is to establish Wright's authority to make fiction a vehicle of sociological commentary (cf. R. Bone 457; Yarborough xxiii) and to put black pain at the forefront of his exposé of Jim Crow. This strategy, of course, dates at least as far back in the African American literary tradition as the antebellum slave narrative: like an ex-bondsman baring his back at an abolition meeting to expose the marks of the lash and thus lend his account of the evils of slavery what Scarry would call the "incontestable reality" of the body (*The Body* 62), Wright bares his own wounds in the vignettes of "Ethics" as witness to the horrors of Jim Crow, and thus to the verisimilitude of the tales that follow. He uses memoir, in other words, as what the critic Robert Stepto calls an authenticating text, as evidence that he knows whereof he writes, that his imaginative creations are grounded in his own bitter and all-too-physical experiences in the South. One could argue that this authenticating function, also noted by Yoshinobu Hakutani (33–34) and John M. Reilly ("Giving" 39–40), is especially crucial in the case of pain texts such as slave or Jim Crow narratives, since such texts inevitably foreground the troubled epistemological status of pain itself, a problem Scarry describes this way:

> For the person whose pain it is, it is "effortlessly" grasped (that is, even with the most heroic effort it cannot *not* be grasped); while for the person outside the sufferer's body, what is "effortless" is *not* grasping it (it is easy to remain wholly un-

> aware of its existence; even with effort, one may remain in doubt about its existence or may retain the astonishing freedom of denying its existence; and, finally, if with the best effort of sustained attention one successfully apprehends it, the aversiveness of the "it" one apprehends will only be a shadowy fraction of the actual "it"). So, for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that "having pain" may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to "have certainty," while for the other person it is so elusive that "hearing about pain" [or, one might add, reading about it] may exist as the primary model of what it is "to have doubt." (*The Body* 4)

Unlike the slave narrators of antebellum times, however, who often turned to leading abolitionists or other white figures to vouch for the veracity of their writings, Wright authors his own authenticating preface to *Uncle Tom's Children*, in a move inaugurated, according to Stepto, by Wright's great predecessor in Jim Crow critique, Du Bois.[2]

Pain appears at the very outset of "Ethics" as an omnipresent fact of black life in the U.S. South and, more insidiously, as a pedagogical tool invoked early and often to back up and drive home the "lessons" of Jim Crow.[3] For the young Wright, the first installment in this soul-killing curriculum occurs when the friendly cinder battles he wages with his black buddies in small-town Arkansas suddenly degenerate, with the appearance of a gang of white boys from across the tracks, into a juvenile but deadly serious version of race war. Wright and his friends confidently lay down a "cinder barrage" (1), but the white boys have them outgunned, responding with "a steady bombardment of broken bottles." In addition to their superior firepower, they boast superior defenses, using "trees, hedges, and the sloping embankments of their lawns" to shield themselves from the cinder attack. The battle quickly becomes a rout, and as the black forces retreat "to the brick pillars of [their] homes," Richard is hit in the head with a broken milk bottle that opens a bleeding gash it will take three stitches to close (1–2).

But the lesson does not end there. Back at home Richard greets his mother with a tearful account of his ordeal only to receive, instead of the sympathy he expects, a brutal beating with a barrel stave. Wright presents the scene as a surreal case study in the pedagogy of pain: "She would smack my rump with the stave, and, while the skin was still smarting, impart to me gems of Jim Crow wisdom. I was never to throw cinders any more. I was never to fight any more wars. I was never, never, under any conditions, to fight *white* folks again. And they were absolutely right in clouting me with the broken milk bottle" (2). Indeed, "I ought to be thankful to God as long as I lived that they didn't kill me" (3). Small wonder that as night descends, the boy, half out of his mind with confusion, anger, betrayal, and pain, sinks into a feverish dream of "monstrous white faces suspended from the ceiling, leering at me." He is still too young to understand that his mother beats him out of love,

that she is willing to accept, indeed to compel his submissiveness and deference to white authority as the necessary cost of survival in an environment so toxic that any black display of "manly self-assertion" (14) is potentially a capital offense. Nor can he appreciate the perverse victory this violent, black mother-love represents for the Jim Crow regime.[4] What he knows, with the absolute knowledge of the body, is a hurt raining down on him from everywhere, from black sources as well as white, a hurt against which neither the homeplace nor the mother can offer sanctuary.

Almost every vignette of "Ethics" returns to this pedagogy of pain, to the "lesson" that any black breach of Jim Crow decorum will be met instantly with searing physical injury or the explicit threat thereof. Should you dare, as Richard dares, to express an interest in learning on the job, one of the white men whom you might thereby displace someday at the worksite will slam your head into the wall and threaten to "rip yo' gut string loose" with a steel bar while his partner slaps you silly (6–7). Should you fall behind in your payments to the white-owned clothing store, as one woman does, you will be beaten bloody by the owners and then, as you stumble back onto the street, arrested for public drunkenness and hauled downtown—a scene Richard witnesses firsthand (7–8). Should you fail just once to say "sir" to the white men who offer you a ride in their car and a sip of their liquor, the next thing you will feel is the "hard . . . cold smash" of the whiskey bottle between your eyes—the milk bottle of childhood returning with a vengeance (9). Should you find yourself on a bicycle in a white neighborhood after sunset, you will be run off the road by a police car and harassed by officers with their guns drawn (10). Should you be caught in a sexual relationship with a white woman—even a prostitute—you will be "castrated and run out of town," a fate that befalls one of Richard's fellow bellboys at a Jackson, Mississippi, hotel (12). Moreover, according to the white hotel manager, you will be a "mighty, mighty lucky bastard" to get off so easy, with mere mutilation and exile. In every case, pain will come screaming down to remind you of the limits of your desires, of your thoughts, words, and deeds, of your ambitions, possibilities, and material means, to pin you between impossible or unworthy choices, to narrow the dimensions of your world to the vanishing point.[5]

These lessons in embodiment and power could have come straight from the pages of *The Body in Pain*. There Scarry defines pain as an experience of embodiment so acute and unremitting as to overwhelm—indeed, to obliterate—all other contents of consciousness. "Intense pain," she writes, "is world-destroying" (29) and "language-destroying" (35). The body and its agony become not just primary realities but the only realities for the subject in pain. As awareness is driven inward, confined solely to the interior of the body, the human subject loses its capacity for self-extension into its environment: the world disintegrates, collapses around one, to become coterminous

with the borders of the body, dooming the person in pain to unbearable isolation, to utter imprisonment in self. Something similar happens to temporality, whose deeper dimensionality flattens out into the sheer immediacy of embodiment: "the most crucial fact about pain is *its presentness*," the fact "that it *is happening*" and happening to the exclusion of anything else (9). Pain's awful privacy is compounded by a fundamental inexpressibility that renders it "unsharab[le]." As Scarry explains, "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4), to precisely those developmental stages where consciousness is dominated by the body's immediate needs. For the hurting subject, there is no world, there are no words, there are no other people, there is nothing else happening, there is only blinding, howling, crushing pain, a black hole of sentience from which no glimmer of awareness is allowed to escape.

To the work of pain Scarry opposes the work of the human imagination, which includes creativity, verbal expression, and material making; for Scarry the two states represent the dialectical "'framing events' within whose boundaries all other perceptual, somatic, and emotional events occur" and thus between whose "two extremes can be mapped the whole terrain of the human psyche" (*The Body* 165). Originating in pain as perhaps the primordial human response to it (181), the imagination mitigates pain in at least two ways. At a rudimentary level, it generates sensory images and linguistic objectifications—"It feels as if an elephant is standing on my chest," "It's like red-hot knitting needles are being driven into my temples"—that allow the "felt-attributes of pain" to be projected outward, "lifted into the visible world," and deflected away from the body (13). Objectifying pain in any way, however modest—naming it, describing it, visualizing or conceptualizing it—has the dual effect of easing, however slightly, its awful privacy, incommunicability, and "totality" (54) and of extending self into world. Imagination thus answers pain's centripetal work of "world contraction" (32) by fostering the centrifugal expansion of self and world. But it also, in its linked capacities of "making-up" and "making-real" (21, 146), sponsors the creation of material artifacts that directly preempt pain by shielding the human body from the ravages of the physical environment—as a coat becomes a kind of second skin or "artificial body tissue" (262), intervening between living human flesh and the winter cold—or otherwise minimizing the burdens of embodiment, as a chair eases the physical discomfort of standing, the pressure on muscles and skeleton of bearing the body's weight for long periods of time.[6] The made object, Scarry brilliantly argues, is "the structure of a perception" (289), the material form taken by a counterfactual wish arising

in the imagination: let there not be pain. What she calls the "interior structure of the artifact," *any* artifact, is "the shape of perceived-pain-wished-gone" (290). Material culture thus confers upon its users the privilege of relative disembodiment, allowing them to live more expansively, to devote their awareness and energies to new projects, new inventions, new acts of making that will continue to remake them in turn (see especially 251–256).

There is a deeply humane element at work in Scarry's argument. Her focus on the interplay between material bodies and material objects grounds a refreshingly concrete approach to questions of justice and power that might otherwise lend themselves to high-flown abstraction. For Scarry, the experience of pain is bound up in physical passivity and vulnerability, the aloneness and nakedness of a body that seems to consist of nothing but clamoring nerve endings: the "feeling of pain entails the feeling of being acted upon" (*The Body* 16). "Consequently, to be intensely embodied . . . is almost always the condition of those without power" (207). Conversely, Scarry links power with disembodiment, in a mutually reinforcing dyad. On the one hand, "power is in its fraudulent as well as its legitimate forms always based on distance from the body," the distance that guarantees invulnerability (46), while on the other hand, "among human beings, the one with authority and power has no body for his inferiors" (210) and thus "no limits on [his] extension out into the world" (207). As we have seen in earlier chapters, a similar logic informs the paradigm of abstract, anesthetized national citizenship discussed by Russ Castronovo, Lauren Berlant, David Lloyd, Donald Pease, and others, which confers political legitimacy and power upon etherealized universal subjects rather than upon historical, contingently embodied persons. In this context, the Jim Crow regime emerges as a structure of national belonging that distributes political and social privileges in precisely this manner, in inverse proportion to the experiences of intense embodiment it just as actively doles out to African Americans. When subjects reduced to their bodies are relegated to, at best, second-class citizenship, the binary structure of Jim Crow citizenship—the chiasmatic relationship between degrees of embodiment and degrees of belonging—proves only too compatible with that of necro citizenship, a continuity that undermines claims of southern exceptionalism advanced by the region's defenders and critics alike.

Since pain also shatters voice, to retain voice is to retain power, and not just the power of self-extension but the "power of self-description" as well (Scarry, *The Body* 279), the articulate command of unshattered language that ensures that the speaker will be represented in the social and political spheres. In Scarry's politics of the body, power boils down to the ability to circumvent the corrosive effects of embodiment oneself or—what amounts to the same thing in practice—the ability to impose embodiment on others. Similarly,

Scarry's ethics of the body is founded upon "the elementary moral distinction between hurting and not hurting" (306). She thus follows the Hebraic scriptures, one of her exemplary texts, in honoring making as "the most holy, most privileged, and most morally authoritative of acts" (222), filling the life-world with artifacts that function as "objectified human compassion" (291), warding off human injury in the equitable distribution of benign disembodiment. By the same token, injustice can take the form of inflicting pain directly, by using artifacts to cause physical suffering rather than to deflect it, or the subtler but equally hurtful form of deflecting the artifacts themselves from those most in need of them. Scarry thus frames a thoroughly materialist definition of poverty that without discounting its psychological effects—shame, dependency, fear, despair—foregrounds its impact on the body, as a wretched state of "near objectlessness" that places its victims in the constant "vicinity of physical pain" (262). "The problem of economic distribution," she continues, "is the problem of distributing the power of artifacts to remake sentience. To summarize this, as we habitually do in everyday conversation, as the problem of 'the haves and the have-nots' is inadequate to express its concussiveness unless it is understood that what is had and had not is the human body" (263).

From this model of distributive justice we can return to *Uncle Tom's Children* and the elaborate "fortifications" that protect the white boys of "Ethics" from the cinder attack of their black rivals (1). Their relative immunity from pain, a sign and product of their material privilege, only underscores young Richard's vulnerability as the meager shelter offered by his house and yard proves inadequate to shield him from injury. Section 1 of "Ethics" graphically records the bodily consequences of living in an object-poor environment. We witness the "world contraction" that accompanies intense embodiment on two distinct levels: a progressive narrowing of spatial focus that takes us from the outdoor battlefield of the boys to the front steps of Richard's homeplace, then inside the house and, after the beating administered by his mother, into the single room where he lies sleepless; and a parallel thinning of the sketch's social texture, as two large gangs of boys yield first to the dissolving ranks of the black combatants, then to the elementary social unit of the black family as modeled by mother and child, and finally to Richard in his solitary bed. We also witness the erosion of voice that accompanies physical suffering: Richard's war wound leaves him inarticulate, able to offer only a "babbled" account of the attack for his mother, whose beating then silences the poor boy entirely, miring him in the inexpressibility of his pain. Then, as the vignette closes, the tiny margin of space that the narrative has managed to reserve for Richard's aching body becomes a mocking theater of white disembodiment, as those leering faces hover and bob in the air around him, taunting him with their incorporeality. The structure of the sketch thus

frames black hyper-embodiment with white disembodiment, black isolation with white collusion, black pain with white power.

Wright takes pains to return this phantasmagoric whiteness to its properly economic context rather than allowing it to float on in mystification. Immediately after recounting his youthful nightmare, he writes, "From that time on . . . [t]he green trees, the trimmed hedges, the cropped lawns grew very meaningful, became a symbol. Even today when I think of white folks, the hard, sharp outlines of white houses surrounded by trees, lawns, and hedges are present somewhere in the background of my mind" (3). As the green of the southern pastoral here revealingly merges with the green of American wealth, Wright stresses that the material sources of white authority ultimately lie not in any mystical racial endowment but in an object-rich world and the exemption from embodiment it promises—not in the presence or absence of pigment on the body's surface but in the presence or absence of pain in its interior.

Black pain in the Jim Crow South, however, must be traced not just to the object-poor African American environment but to the active participation of whites in the deeply unethical work Scarry calls unmaking. Unmaking occurs whenever the work of imagination and material culture is deliberately reversed, redirected into the infliction of physical injury and suffering and the deconstruction of language, artifact, and world. When unmaking is limited to individuals or small groups and when it is nonreciprocal—that is, when injuring only happens in one direction—it approaches the limit condition of torture. When it involves large-scale collectivities engaged in reciprocal injuring, it approaches the limit condition of war. Both of these limit conditions play important roles in the vision of southern race relations that informs *Uncle Tom's Children*. Moreover, the fundamental moral opposition between making and unmaking supplies Wright with a paradigmatic narrative structure for the early stories of his volume, a structure that can already be glimpsed in the micronarrative of the cinder battle that opens "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" (1–2). Every tale in *Uncle Tom's Children* opens in a similar way, on a scene, however brief, of black world-making. We see black people involved, singly and collectively, in labors of imagination and invention. If it seems strange to invoke the cinder battle as an example of Scarry's "making," Adam Gussow has posited just such black-on-black "intimate violence" as a constitutive element of African American blues expressivity as the latter developed in the turn-of-the-century South (201–220). Acknowledging that Wright undoubtedly intends an ironic subtext to his account of a game that encourages black boys to join the rest of the Jim Crow South in visualizing the woolly heads of their cohorts as "target[s]" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 1), I would still suggest that this ritual is affirmative and constructive in its creation of a (relatively) safe space for black male aggressive-

ness and self-assertion. Indeed, though we will learn that the cinders leave bruises, such body damage is specifically withheld from the opening paragraphs, which allude instead to the "great fun" of this prelapsarian exercise in black creativity and agency.

What inevitably follows in Wright's monomyth of Jim Crow is the intrusion of whiteness onto the scene of black making. That whiteness may take the explicit form of physical violence, as here, or it may take other forms, such as a white visit to a black home, white-owned property, or simply white ideology objectified and dramatized as character perspective. But the result is always the same: black making, by which I refer to cultural invention and performance *by* African Americans, quickly deteriorates into black unmaking, by which I refer to the infliction of pain *on* African Americans and the deconstruction of those artifacts that extend them into their world or envelop and protect them from it. The grammatical slippage of the word "black" from the first phrase to the second, from blackness as the subject of making to blackness as the object of unmaking, is already indicative of the human damage being done in such moments, the plunge from agency into vulnerability and victimization.[7] A parallel movement can be found in the political sphere, in the degeneration of intimate violence, with its overtones of black invention and self-extension, into the strictly white-on-black violence Gussow calls "disciplinary" (2–3).

Throughout *Uncle Tom's Children*, one of the most visible and reliable signs that the transition from black making to black unmaking is under way—and one of the principal means by which this transition is accomplished—is the devolution of artifacts into weapons. The object world of Wright's text literally teems with weapons; if, as we have already seen, this world is, on the one hand, too impoverished to offer its black inhabitants adequate relief from embodiment, on the other hand, it proves all too rich in its ability to damage or even destroy them. In addition to objects explicitly designed as weapons—knives, whips, and the volume's seemingly ubiquitous guns—we frequently encounter other, more unlikely objects that attest to the terrible resourcefulness of white southerners bent on domination, the perverse creativity they are willing to put into the enterprise of unmaking: a pair of boots (brought crashing into a woman's head), automobiles (ramming a bicycle rider into the curb or serving as a moving platform from which to pitch a boy onto the street), a log (a young man's knees are broken over it), the human hand (knotted into a fist or slammed palm first into the side of a head to puncture an eardrum), a pillow (torn open to assist in tarring and feathering a boy), a living tree (a man is tied to it in order to be bullwhipped), a handful of turnip greens (hurled at a human face), as well as the bottles and barrel staves we have already encountered in "Ethics."

Still, Wright's choice of a milk bottle as the first individuated object to be hurled by whites down the path of unmaking and as the first object in *Uncle Tom's Children* to break the surface of the human body is particularly devastating. No doubt the connection between the white fluid it was once this bottle's function to hold, the white hand that threw it, and the white faces that float in the dark at the other end of this episode would not have been lost on the author—nor, perhaps, on young Richard himself. Far more shattering than its association with whiteness, though, is the bottle's association with the substance that, perhaps more than any other, symbolizes human sustenance and the nurturing of the young. Itself a product of the maternal body, milk literally fortifies the bodies of children. This deep significance, the objectified human compassion present in a simple bottle of milk and captured in such linguistic formulations as the "milk of human kindness," is precisely what is unmade when that bottle is launched at a youthful human body. As the broken glass slices into Richard's flesh, the feeling of betrayal must be nearly as acute as if the primordial milk-bearer, comforter, and champion against pain had been herself unmade. And then, outrageously, she *is* unmade, twisted by the Jim Crow lessons she has internalized into a weapon turned against her own son. When she seizes the barrel stave to pour more pain onto her boy, it must be as if the milk bottle has shattered in Richard's face all over again.

The mother's betrayal also opens up a breach in the black homeplace, whose sheltering function is compromised, short-circuited, as the ripple effect of unmaking spreads to encompass the domestic.[8] Ordinarily the paradigmatic "ground of all making" (Scarry, *The Body* 45), the space most closely associated with the work of material culture itself, the domestic is here deconstructed into a field of pain. Indeed, as Richard's hallucinations make clear, it is occupied ground, possessed by the white spirits that, like genies sprung from the broken bottle and smuggled across the family threshold by the mother's Jim Crow ventriloquism, add insult to Richard's injuries. As Scarry points out, the targeting of the domestic for systematic "mutilation" and unmaking is one of the hallmarks of torture (see especially *The Body* 38–45). It is uncanny how often the scene of torture, in regimes around the world, closely mimics a domestic setting only to turn its most basic structural features—walls, doors, ceilings, windows, floors, chairs, tables, bathtubs, telephones, electrical sockets, wires—inside out, into instruments for the infliction of great pain. If "Ethics" thus comes close to suggesting that the Jim Crow South is a regime of unmaking so comprehensive that it can turn even the black homeplace into a torture chamber for African Americans, other stories in *Uncle Tom's Children* depict acts of torture explicitly and in excruciating detail. One of those stories directly follows "Ethics" in the 1940 volume.

The Vortex of Unmaking: "Big Boy Leaves Home"

Like its predecessor, "Big Boy Leaves Home" conforms to the triadic narrative structure of black making–white intrusion–black unmaking, though it depicts each stage in considerably more depth than "Ethics."[9] Indeed, the opening pages of the story represent one of the most lingering, loving looks at black folk culture in the entire Wright oeuvre.[10] In light of Scarry's political distinction between embodiment and disembodiment, it is significant that the story's four protagonists enter the text not as bodies but as voices. Big Boy Morrison and his friends Lester, Buck, and Bobo acquire physical form and proper names only after Wright calls attention to the way their voices "r[i]se out of the woods" (*Uncle Tom's Children* 17) to be "caught . . . up" by their mates and "blend[ed]" into the "harmony" of collaborative verbal and musical creation:

> Yo mama don wear no drawers
> Ah seena when she pulled em off,
> N she washed em in alcohol,
> N she hung em out in the hall,
> N then she put em back on her QUALL! (18; emphasis removed)

The bawdy neologism of the last line attests to the element of invention at work in Big Boy's verbal play. Meanwhile, the upward, outward movement of the rising voices models the "inherent largesse" of the imagination (Scarry, *The Body* 323), its habit of "going out into the world" to ease the burden of embodiment, much as their harmony evokes the "socialization of sentience" by which acts of making relieve the body's solitude (255). We listen as the imagination goes to work on the pinched dimensions of black life in the segregated South, first embracing and then embellishing the whistle of a locomotive into a freedom song, a symbol of social mobility and spiritual possibility, "[b]oun fer up Noth" but also "boun fo Glory" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 19), which prompts dreams of "goin Noth some day," where "colored folks . . . is got ekual rights" (28): making up as a prelude to making real.[11] And again as it goes to work on hunger, generating a counterfactual feast of "good ol salty ribs," "good ol egg cornbread," "buttermilk," and "hot peach cobbler swimmin in juice" that turns the emptiness of the belly into an occasion for verbal plenty (22).[12] Again we encounter intimate violence, as the boys wrestle on the way to a local swimming hole, and then again at the water's edge where, in a moment of pastoral chiaroscuro, Lester and Buck push their buddies into the creek, "sending up silver spray in the sunlight" (26). After the hair-trigger tensions of "Ethics," there is a surprising ease and expansiveness to the scene.[13] The natural environment is be-

nign and welcoming: the ground is soft and warm, "[j]us lika bed" (18), and the chilly water of the swimming hole is invigorating. Even the act of crossing a barbed-wire fence (23) seems less an offense against private property than another manifestation of large-spirited movement into and through the world, much as the nakedness of the boys at the swimming hole seems less sexual than, once again, prelapsarian.

With the appearance of a "white woman . . . on the edge of the opposite embankment," however, everything, including that nakedness, changes, and the entire elaborate structure of folk creativity and world adequacy instantly collapses into chaos and unmaking. In a thought-provoking essay, the folklore scholar Jay Mechling has called attention to a surprising "failure of folklore" at work in Wright's 1945 autobiography, *Black Boy*. Building on the theoretical work of Gregory Bateson, Mechling argues that one of the most important functions of folklore is to offer subjects the creative and communicative resources to negotiate "the double binds and other paradoxes of communication" that attend everyday life within a given community or culture (281). In *Black Boy*, however, Wright repeatedly demonstrates the inadequacy of black folk practices in helping him meet the social, political, and linguistic challenges of "intercultural encounters" with racist whites (288). Mechling concludes his analysis on a cautionary note: "folklore may not be an effective source of resistance against the hegemony enjoyed by the dominant culture," a possibility that will "not come as good news to those inclined to romanticize the folklore of the underclass" (292).[14] In "Big Boy Leaves Home" the problem is if anything even more acute: it is not so much that the folk practices of the boys "fail" in the intercultural encounter with whites as that they are systematically obliterated by the onslaught of violence and hegemonic language that characterizes this encounter. First to go, as it was first to appear in the story, is black voice, as the verbal improvisation and daring of only a few pages before empties out into numbing monotony and repetition: "C mon, les git our cloes. . . . Whut t hell! Ahma git mah cloes"; "Ahm goin wid Big Boy n git mah cloes"; "C mon, les git our cloes! . . . Lady, we wannna git our cloes. . . . We wanna git our cloes" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 29–30). This is the poverty that replaces poetry when language is unmade.

Next, as disciplinary violence once again usurps and deconstructs intimate violence, Lester and Buck are gunned down, the latter "sending up a shower of bright spray to the sunlight" as he "topple[s] headlong" into the creek (31) and the earlier pastoral imagery of the scene is turned against itself. Then the intraracial wrestling of earlier pages reappears in denatured form, as a deadly serious struggle in which Big Boy and Bobo manage to overpower the white man and shoot him with his own gun (31–32). The "CRACK! . . . CRACK! . . . CRACK! . . . CRACK!" of the rifle that punctuates the scene

(30–32) seems to have absorbed all the expressive force that formerly resided in black speech, even as it reproduces the general monotony and expressive exhaustion that the white characters have brought in their wake.

Indeed, it is as if the initial moment of white intrusion operates as a hideous vortex, a still point into which every major element of the opening scene is drawn and then spit out mangled or dismantled, its significance reversed. When the surviving boys climb back over the barbed-wire fence on their way home, knowing the momentum is already gathering for a lynching, the crossing can no longer be read as a jaunty transgression or confident sallying forth into the world but instead signals that the world contraction of unmaking is already under way. The natural world has turned hostile: the "vines and bushes" that the boys initially beat back with sticks on their way to the swimming hole (17) now trip them up in their flight and scratch their faces (33), the sun that once warmed and comforted them is now a "wide glare" that threatens exposure, and the stubbles left from a previous harvest now bruise their feet as the fugitives cross a cornfield (34). As Big Boy stumbles into his house and begins to unburden himself to his family, the work of unmaking follows the same sequence and exhibits the same Chinese-box structure that we saw in "Ethics." Language continues to unravel as Big Boy, first "wordlessly," then "mutely," then inarticulately, struggles to get his story out, only to be interrupted and even castigated by his mother (35–37). The cacophony that results produces an account so fragmented that it prompts the father's exaggerated outburst, "Whut happened? Cant yuh-all talk?" (37). Simply the mention of white people is enough to cut black speech off at the source, to reduce everyone to incredulous silence:

> "Big Boy done gone n killed a white man."
>
> Sanders stopped short, then came forward, his face thrust out, his mouth open. His lips moved several times before he could speak. (40; see also 37)

Again, as in "Ethics," the inadequacy of the black mother, the limits of her compassion and of her ability to protect her son—"Ah done done all Ah kin fer yuh, Big Boy. Only Gawd kin hep yuh now" (37)—is directly tied to the inadequacy of the black homeplace as a haven from the violent Jim Crow environment: "Yuh-all better git this boy outta here right now," a church elder warns the family, "[c]ause if yuh don there's gonna be a lynchin" (43). The maternal and the domestic are thus unmade together, in a process that will be completed after Big Boy's departure, when the white mob descends on the Morrison house, burns it down, and reduces Mrs. Morrison to the aggrieved howls of an infant or animal. In a similar manner, the freight train that once promised freedom and mobility is enlisted in the work of world contraction, degraded into an omen of "*sho* death" (42). As Big Boy flees his unsafe home for a nearby hillside where he hopes to elude the white mob by

hiding in a kiln the boys have dug into the earth, the sound of an approaching train now brings "terror" and "a sharp sense of danger" (46) rather than hope or exhilaration.

Far from a sanctuary, however, that hill becomes a theater of violence, as the deterministic logic of the story draws Big Boy's black friend and his white enemies inexorably toward his hiding place.[15] Here the element of torture is not approximate as in "Ethics" but literal: Big Boy will watch helplessly as Bobo is dragged by the white mob to a slope opposite his own and slowly lynched. But as Wright stages the scene, Big Boy doesn't just witness the violence; he also undergoes it vicariously. His experiences in the kiln mimic those of the lynching victim, in a manner just attenuated enough to allow him, unlike his friend, to survive the ordeal. In a sense, the fate of the two boys is already prefigured in the relationship between their names: "Bobo," after all, is a near-repetition of "Big Boy," and as such a harbinger of the doubling at work in the lynching scene. But its near-nonsense syllables also represent a partial disintegration of "Big Boy," a reduction of its semantic content to the stuttering prattle of phonemes. It is as if Bobo's half-unmade name already knows that he will be hurled further than his friend and double into the cauldron of unmaking.

The lynching scene continues the story's systematic, symmetrical work of deconstructing the opening narrative of black making.[16] This time, for instance, it is the whites who enter the scene as disembodied voices:

> "Hoalo!"
> "Hoalo!"
> "Wheres yuh?"
> "Over here on Bullards Road!"
> "C mon over!"
> "Awright!"
> He heard footsteps. Then voices came again, low and far away this time. (52)

It takes nearly another page for these invisible figures to materialize. Clearly, the political privileges of disembodiment have shifted irrevocably whiteward. By contrast, Big Boy is mired in silence, embodiment, and intense anxiety about his potential visibility as he crouches within the hillside. Killing the large snake that guards the entrance to his kiln, for instance, only makes him all the more aware of the vulnerability of his body: "When inside he felt there must be snakes all about him, ready to strike. It seemed he could see and feel them there, waiting tensely in coil. In the dark he imagined long white fangs ready to sink into his neck, his side, his legs" (47–48). The text repeatedly emphasizes the cold and dampness of the kiln's clay floor, along with Big Boy's growing hunger and thirst as he lies there (48, 51). "[S]hift[ing] his body to ease the cold damp of the ground" (49), he also begins to shift

his mind, into memories and daydreams that briefly deliver him from the physical exigencies of his predicament (48–50).

Significantly, the voices of the whites, as they recount their attack on the Morrison home or go over the items on their laundry list of lynching paraphernalia (52–53), put an end to this expansive counterfactual work of the imagination: "He did not wonder if they were coming after him. He just waited. He did not wonder about Bobo. He rested his cheek against the cold clay, waiting" (53). These events begin to introduce a powerful ambiguity into the image of the kiln, an ambiguity that only grows deeper as the scene of torture escalates. A kiln, after all, is supposed to be a site of making, where the raw materials of the earth are transformed into human artifacts, objects of utility or beauty. And it is certainly possible to read the kiln's function throughout the lynching scene in these basically constructive, benevolent terms, to see it not merely as an attenuated form of shelter and concealment but as the site of Big Boy's initiation into manhood, where his human clay is hardened or "fired" into maturity by bitter adversity. Yet the kiln is also the site of great bodily discomfort and the collapse of imagination into a claustrophobic numbness devoid of all "wonder." Indeed, from the time he curls himself into the kiln until, some twelve hours and nearly twelve pages of the narrative later, he crawls out to board the truck that will carry him north to safety, Big Boy does not speak a single word (47–59). The necessity of avoiding detection, the horror he witnesses, and the physical ordeal of his night in the kiln combine to reduce him to that "state anterior to language" (Scarry, *The Body* 4) that is captured in the root meaning of the word "infant." The cramped confines of the kiln function as a space of world contraction and unmaking—or, put another way, as a space ordinarily devoted to making that has itself been unmade. The kiln's indeterminacy as site and symbol, then, already anticipates the dual black experiences of physical space that Houston A. Baker Jr. has teased out of later Wright works such as *12 Million Black Voices*, *Native Son*, and "The Man Who Lived Underground." On one hand is the cramped, dehumanizing confinement that Baker traces from the hold of slave ships to the cabins of slaves and sharecroppers to the kitchenette apartments of Chicago, a phenomenology of space as nonplace that Baker refers to as "the hole" ("Richard Wright" 89–97); and on the other is the dialectically opposed space of luminous creativity, strategic inaccessibility, political resistance, and subterranean blues energies that Baker terms "the black (w)hole" (*Blues* 144–172).[17]

The unmaking at work inside the kiln parallels the unmaking at work outside it. As the mob goes about its grisly business, we once again witness artifacts being warped into the weapons of torture: "coils of rope," feathers from a pillow, a barrel of tar, a can of gasoline, sticks of wood, chains (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 53–57). That these items are drawn from do-

mestic space—the hearth where the wood offers its warmth, the bedroom where the pillow cushions the sleeping head—and from the public sphere, where gasoline powers cars and trucks over tar-covered roadways, and ropes and chains haul merchandise or secure it against damage, only underscores the fact that neither space is exempt from the world-destroying work of Jim Crow "justice." As this work proceeds and as the black voice is deconstructed into Bobo's screams (57) and Big Boy's silence, white voices are correspondingly amplified, in the same uppercase orthography used earlier to convey the report of Jim's rifle: "AH WANNA BE THE FIRS T PUT A ROPE ON THA BLACK BASTARDS NECK!" (55), "BRING SOME MO WOOD!" (56), "PO ON MO GAS!" (57), "WE GOT IM! WE GOT IM!" (54)—the latter recalling in its repetition the deadened effect of postlapsarian language at the swimming hole.[18] The mob also picks up and perverts the motif of singing from the story's early pages: twice, the line "We'll hang ever nigger t a sour apple tree" drifts over to Big Boy from the opposite hillside (54, 55; emphasis removed), in deliberate mockery of the famous vow in the Union marching song "John Brown's Body" to "hang Jeff Davis" in an identical manner. The mob, in other words, doesn't just unmake the act of singing; it unmakes the song itself, turning an abolitionist rallying cry into a Jim Crow lynching anthem. Finally, the capitalized injunction to "GIT SOURVINEERS!" (56) serves as a reminder—for any reader in danger of forgetting—that torture takes as its goal not merely the deconstruction of language, artifact, and world but the destruction of a specific human body. The peculiar rituals of lynching carry that work even further, to the complete disintegration of the African American body, first into fingers, ears, and "tar-drenched" torso (57), then into a "writhing white mass gradually growing black" in the flames, and last of all into the ash that remains beneath a "charred sapling" on the hillside (60).[19] Faced with his friend's actual and his own vicarious reduction to inanimate matter—in another instance of the reverse autochthony that reduces the black lynching victim of Toomer's "Portrait in Georgia" to ash—Big Boy can do little beside "slid[e] back into the hole, his face buried in clay" (57). The world has shrunk to the contours of that hole, bearing down on him with all its awful weight and indifference. "He had no feelings now," the narrator observes, "no fears. He was numb, empty, as though all blood had been drawn from him" (57).

One measure of the glimmer of hope that peeks out of the story's brief final section is that, as Big Boy bids farewell to the South from the back of Will's truck, the object world around him begins to resume its "sheltering" function. A "stack of wooden boxes" becomes an impromptu chair, taking stress off the back and shoulders that have pressed all night against the clay walls of the kiln (60). Other boxes offer the boy purchase whenever the truck leans hard into a curve. Later, a hat is handed back to him, dripping with the

water that will assuage his burning thirst (61). Though a "dull pain" remains in his belly, the presence of human companionship and the benign agency of material culture help differentiate the enclosed space of the truck bed from the cramped, lonely space of the kiln, reintroducing an element of the domestic even as Big Boy reverts to the fetal position to sleep off his long ordeal. Even so, the publication of *Native Son* in 1940 suggests retrospectively that this ordeal may not end with Big Boy's escape north. The continuities Wright builds into the names of his protagonists, Big Boy Morrison and Bigger Thomas, hint that the two texts might be read as consecutive installments in a black male coming-of-age story that includes a migration narrative.[20] *Native Son* is reticent about the forces that have pushed or pulled Bigger and his family out of the South toward Chicago, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that Bigger's southern past includes scenes of trauma much like Big Boy's—that, again as in Toomer's *Cane*, racial violence may have precipitated black migration. If so, if "Big Boy Leaves Home" is on some level the prologue to *Native Son*, a premigration backstory for Bigger Thomas, then by the same token Bigger's story may function as the sequel to Big Boy's, offering a glimpse of the young man's future in a world where segregation by law does not exist but discrimination against African Americans manages to persist in subtler forms that allow white ideology to maintain its hot, tight grip on the belly of black America.[21]

Cosmic Aversiveness: "Down by the Riverside"

According to Scarry, "The first, most essential, aspect of pain is its sheer aversiveness. While other sensations have content that may be positive, neutral, or negative, the very content of pain is itself negation. . . . Pain is . . . an immediate sensory rendering of 'against,' of something being against one, and of something one must be against. Even though it occurs within oneself, it is at once identified as 'not oneself,' 'not me,' as something so alien that it must right now be gotten rid of" (*The Body* 52). As we have seen, the opening stories of *Uncle Tom's Children* unmask the Jim Crow regime as a gigantic structure of "against," as sheer aversiveness given material, institutional, and even ritual form. For Wright's black southerners this aversiveness is experienced affectively, as emotional tension and distress; cognitively, as antagonism that can be given an object and a name (both typically white); and somatically, as visceral pain. In "Down by the Riverside," however, Wright's account of a black paterfamilias named Mann as he attempts to navigate the physical and social dangers of the 1927 Mississippi River flood, this aversiveness, more than anywhere else in the volume, takes on a cosmic dimension. The story opens with yet another assault on the domestic—not, however, by a gang of whites this time, but by rising waters that seem the work of an indif-

ferent nature or an angry God (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 62). This is the elemental force that will later rip houses from their foundations, send them tilting and spinning across the waters like bathtub toys (102, 105, 108–109, 111), and reduce their furnishings and other contents to useless debris—"a broken chair: a crumpled rug: strewn clothing: a smashed dresser: a tumbled bed" (110)—or, worse, to weapons plunging treacherously and unpredictably among the motorboats and rowboats that brave the floodwaters (106).

The deity who presides over this vast exercise in unmaking and to whom Mann and his family pray for deliverance in another of the volume's beautiful evocations of black expressive culture (71–73) is, of course, the God of the Judeo-Christian scriptures, the God of the Flood. In this way Wright, working in a well-established typological tradition in African American culture and letters, links the plight of his characters to the biblical travails of the Hebrew people. In a brilliant discussion, Scarry has examined the peculiar relationship between the Hebrews and their God—or as Scarry sometimes pointedly puts it, their primary Artifact—a God that insists on utter disembodiment, placing severe restrictions on the making of material images or even the use of the divine name (*The Body* 206), and that turns repeatedly instead to the bodies of his earthly subjects to demonstrate his existence and authority. In this process, which Scarry calls analogical verification, God borrows the bodies of the Hebrews' enemies or, just as often, of the Hebrews themselves, projecting his own attributes into the world by altering human tissue, laying human pain "edge to edge," as Scarry likes to say, with his own incorporeal power in order to imbue the latter with the palpable reality of the former.[22] In the Hebrew Bible, analogical verification typically takes one of two forms: wounding, in which God enters the human realm more or less *as* a weapon, wreaking havoc among backsliders and nonbelievers (183–184, 198–210); or procreation, in which God manifests his pleasure or displeasure by opening or closing the wombs of Hebrew women (186–187, 194–195). As Scarry points out, the two modes can already be glimpsed in the punishments God hands down in the garden of Eden, where divine authority in human matters is tested for the first time. The price of Adam and Eve's disobedience, after all, is that work and childbirth—the labor of human making and the labor of making humans—both become deeply embodied activities (209–210). Or we might say that the price of doubting the authority of God's word is that the prelapsarian human form is altered so as to *become* a body as we now know it, susceptible to pain, injury, and, of course, death. As the punishment is carried out and "[m]an and woman move outside the garden to the realm of the troublesome body" (210), the divine voice correspondingly acquires resonance and weight: when God speaks, the Hebrews must learn to listen. Indeed, they spend large parts of the Old Testament absorbing this lesson. In its own way this, too, is a pedagogy of pain.

The effect of the catastrophic flood in "Down by the Riverside" is to heighten the intensity of precisely these "troublesome" forms of embodiment. Once Mann and his family gain access to a rowboat and set off from their drowning homestead for town, the narrative zeroes in on two primary facts of the body. One is the fact of Mann's pain and exhaustion throughout his almost superhuman labors to propel his fragile craft forward against the current and pilot his family to safety: "With each sweep of the oar he weighed the bulk of the boat in his back, his neck, his shoulders" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 74); "His back was getting tired. His fingers burned; he paused a second and dipped them into the cold black water" (76); "He steered for the lights, feeling hunger, fatigue, thirst. The dull ache came back to his head: the oars were heavy, almost too heavy to hold" (78); "His fingers were hot and loose, as though all the feeling in his hands had turned to fire" (82). The other is the fact of his wife, Lulu's, agony as she struggles, after four days in labor (63), to deliver their child: the arduous journey to town and the hospital is punctuated first by her wordless groans (75), later by her even more terrible silence (82).[23] It is as if the God of the Old Testament, out of inscrutable disfavor or divine whim, has opened her womb to conception only to close it, irrevocably, against parturition. As Mann's sister puts it, "Her hips is jus too little" (65). Cosmic aversiveness meets the body as a microcosm of world contraction.

Before Mann's odyssey even begins, however, there are hints of another form of aversiveness at work in his world, one traceable to human rather than to divine or cosmic influence. The sound of gunshots drifting over the yellow waters of the flood to his cabin, for instance, is a reminder that Jim Crow realities persist even in the face of natural disaster: "Mus be trouble, mus be trouble somewhere. He had heard that the white folks were threatening to conscript all Negroes they could lay their hands on to pile sand- and cement-bags on the levee" (64). More shots interrupt Mann's anxieties about the town's segregated medical facility (66). And when Mann's kinsman Bob arrives, he brings the unsettling news that the boat he has brought is stolen property—stolen, moreover, from the white postmaster, Heartfield (69). He also confirms Mann's suspicions of racial unrest on the levee: "They drivin em like slaves. Ah heard they done killed two-three awready whut tried t run erway. . . . Everwhere Ah looked wuznt nothin but white men wid guns" (69). There are even subtle reminders of the racial atrocity of "Big Boy Leaves Home": at night the floodwaters run thick and black like "liquid tar" (62), and Bob is first seen handling "a coil of rope" (66). The general atmosphere is tense and brooding. "Tha shootin might mean anything," muses Mann, "[b]ut likely as not its jus some po black man gone" (64), a remark whose weary fatalism is echoed by another family member: "Sistah James boy got killed in a flood jus like this" (68).

These Jim Crow premonitions explode into violence when Mann pulls the rowboat beneath a lighted window to call for help. Disoriented by the high water, he fails to recognize that the house belongs to Heartfield, who, however, has no trouble recognizing the boat as his own property. Instantly the machinery of black unmaking lurches into gear. As in the preceding story, language grows repetitive and impoverished as the white voices rise:

> A voice came, cold, angry.
> "Nigger, where you steal that boat?"
> . . .
> "Where you steal that boat, nigger! Thats *my* boat!"
> Then Mann heard softer voices.
> "Thats our boat, Father! Its *white*!"
> "Thats our boat, Henry! Thats *our* boat . . ."
> "Dont you hear me, nigger! Bring that boat back here!"
> . . .
> "Nigger, dont you take that boat! Ill kill you!" (79)

Again we hear gunfire erupt, again a white man falls dead (79–81), and again Wright's black protagonist becomes a fugitive. From this moment, the story's true fulcrum, it is only a matter of time before Mann succumbs to the forces arrayed against him. Not the cosmic forces, however, so much as the social ones.

Two points are worth making here. First, however much we may be tempted to view natural disasters like the 1927 flood as great leveling events that reduce all persons caught up in them to their essential human attributes—courage, physical strength, determination, endurance, resourcefulness—Wright suggests instead that the exigencies of the flood do little or nothing to disrupt the hierarchies of power and privilege that define Jim Crow—and may in fact only intensify them. The whites, after all, still patrol the streets and levees with guns and use them against African Americans without discrimination or restraint. Some white characters are making money off the flood, selling or trading boats at exorbitant prices—which they can do, of course, because they *own* the boats—or buying back mules from desperate, cash-strapped sharecroppers at a severe discount (67). Wright's portrait of social relations during the 1927 flood is consistent with historical accounts of the crisis that document how its conditions of emergency only tightened the grip of white supremacy in the Mississippi Valley, nowhere more so than in Greenville, Mississippi, the city upon which Wright seems to have modeled the unnamed river town of his story (see, for instance, Barry; Cobb, *Most Southern Place*; Daniel, *Deep 'n*). As Sterling A. Brown observed in a contemporary review of *Uncle Tom's Children*, the story is unparalleled in its account of "the abuses of prejudice made more acute by catastrophe" (23).

This brings us to the second point. Wright's tale captures the elemental energy and chaos of the flood, but it ultimately depicts white power as an even more elemental and unstoppable force—one that shows no promise of subsiding when the waters eventually recede. The difference in magnitude between the two forces can be seen in Mann's contrasting responses to them. To the challenge of the rising waters and to his wife's need for medical help—to the exigencies of nature and the body—he responds actively, vigorously. As soon as the boat appears, he launches himself and his loved ones into a hostile natural environment whose indifference to his suffering he refuses to accept lying down. "He bent to with the oars, straining, sweeping hard, feeling that he must now fight" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 75). And fight he does, almost past the point of endurance—right up to the moment when he kills the white postmaster in self-defense, whereupon his resolve immediately begins to melt, yielding to a paralyzing fatalism: "Mann . . . felt weak from fear: he had a choking impulse to stop: he felt he was lost because he had shot a white man: he felt there was no use in rowing any longer. . . . [A]ll at once he was limp, nerveless; he felt that getting the boat to the hospital now meant nothing" (81). This pessimism—which proves justified, since Lulu dies before he reaches the hospital—is matched by passivity. For the remainder of the story, Mann is basically a black pawn shuttled around by white authority figures: the soldiers who reduce his heroism in the boat to comic spectacle (84–85); the doctors and nurses who trivialize his grief at losing Lulu and their child (87–89); the officers who conscript him first for levee duty (92–99), then for rescue work back at the hospital (100–104), and then, incredibly, send him in a boat to pick up the surviving members of the Heartfield family (105–112); the general who pronounces his fate when the rescue party reaches the hills and the Heartfields turn on their deliverer (116–121); and the soldiers who finally gun him down when he breaks and runs rather than face a firing squad (123).[24] Significantly, these figures come to replace God in Mann's discourse as an object of supplication and prayer: "CAPM, PLEASE! HAVE MERCY ON ME, CAPM!" (92); "White folks, have mercy! Ah didn't mean t kill him!" (121). The story's bitterest irony is that after struggling so valiantly against the world God has made, Mann so largely capitulates to the world the whites have made. White power thus appears omnipotent, omnipresent: even for a rebel against cosmic forces, resistance to Jim Crow appears futile.

Indeed, the Heartfield episode marks the moment when the world contraction that Mann has fended off by gathering his family and meeting the mounting flood head-on finally comes crashing down around him. Thereafter he is systematically stripped of his wife and unborn child (both dead), the boat he went to such violent extremes to hang onto (commandeered by

white soldiers), his grandmother and remaining child (put on another boat and sent to high ground), his gun (discovered by soldiers when he is interrogated about Heartfield's death), and finally, of course, his life. As event after event conspires to propel him toward his doom, his psychological sense of entrapment is expressed in the physical sensation of being crowded and crushed by whites. Seated in front of Mrs. Heartfield and her children on a motorboat bound for the hills, "[h]e felt them all over his body, and especially like something hard and cold weighing on top of his head, weighing so heavily that it seemed to blot out everything but one hard, tight thought: They got me now" (113).[25] At the refugee camp, as he walks "past white people who stared sullenly," he feels as if his body is "encased in a tight vise, in a narrow black coffin that move[s] with him as he move[s]" (114). Brought before a military tribunal and charged with Heartfield's killing, he feels the crowd of white onlookers "pressing in" and "clos[ing] in tightly" until he is "lifted off his feet in a tight circle of faces" (118). And his consciousness registers only one overwhelming reality: "A thought circled round and round in his mind, circled so tightly he could hardly think it! They goin t kill me. . . . They goin t kill me" (117). The only response Mann can manage to this comprehensive collapse of his world is to run from his executioners—not to elude death so much as to reimpose some tiny element of control over it, to recapture, at the price of his life, some minuscule sliver of his freedom by propelling himself, however briefly, back into that lost world.

We could say, then, that as "Down by the Riverside" treads the volume's familiar narrative path toward black destruction and as white southerners usurp the place of God, the impact of unmaking extends beyond the represented world of character and action to the text itself, denaturing the operation of literary genre. Wright's tale begins in an epic register, plunging us, *in medias res*, into the heroic exploits of a representative human figure locked in mortal combat with a suddenly alien, animate landscape. Even the National Guardsmen who tow his boat the final mile or so to the hospital grudgingly acknowledge his bravery and prowess in taking on the raging waters of the flood: "Six men were drowned today trying to make it to town in rowboats. And here you come, rowing *three* people" (85). By this time, however, the story's generic center of gravity has already begun to shift from epic, with its emphasis on singular achievement, toward the deterministic and thickly social account of the human environment typical of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary naturalism.[26] The encounter with Heartfield catalyzes this generic shift, precipitating the fall of Mann from a subject of epic/existential struggle to an object of racist oppression and violence. Not least of the burdens that Mann lays down by the riverside in his final throes is the burden of a heroic individuality that the whites around him stubbornly refuse to see.

Commodification and the Invaded Domestic: "Long Black Song"

Heartfield's white gaze, objectified in the "yellow flare" of his flashlight (80), turns Mann's rowboat from a sheltering artifact into an item of private property that approximates the action of a weapon in the way it inspires (and, in the white mind, justifies) violence against the black family. The racial hostilities of "Big Boy Leaves Home" are similarly linked to a perceived black offense against white property, breaking out soon after Big Boy and his friends decide to trespass on old man Harvey's land. In the fourth story of *Uncle Tom's Children*, the widely anthologized "Long Black Song," Wright's account of private property, and in particular of the commodity, *as* a form of violence against working-class black southerners receives much more thorough and explicit development. Like "Big Boy," "Long Black Song" opens on a beautiful scene of black folk creativity and expressivity. Like "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" and (to a degree) "Down by the Riverside," it opens with black domesticity as well, upon a black homeplace whose inevitable destruction becomes the story's truest measure of the impact and scope of black unmaking. And like "Riverside" and (though in a different way) "Big Boy," the story pivots on an objectifying white gaze that brings violence and death in its wake. "Long Black Song" weaves these separate elements into a critique of capitalist commodification and its corrosive effects on southern race relations, a critique that in its close attention to the dynamic of making and unmaking, embodiment and disembodiment that surrounds the commodity, anticipates Scarry's neomaterialist innovations on the classic Marxist analysis of the commodity form. The critic Bruce Robbins pokes gentle fun at the inflated claims of contemporary commodity histories that single out their quotidian subjects—coffee, corn, tobacco, cod—as Archimedean levers that "changed the world" for capitalism (454). But in Wright's deadly serious fable, such a claim would not be mere hyperbole, for in the most immediate and direct way, the commodity does change the black world, invading it and shaking it to its very foundations before finally destroying it.

The story's title immediately calls attention to the lullaby that gets it under way, with a young black mother named Sarah singing softly to her baby daughter, Ruth. As the sun descends over their cabin and surrounding farm, the pair awaits the return of the husband and "Papa" who has (in the words of the lullaby) "gone t town" to take the family's cotton crop to market (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 125; emphasis removed). As Sarah briefly nurses the child, the maternal milk whose deconstruction in the opening vignette of "Ethics" proved so physically and spiritually wounding to young Richard is here reinvoked in a more benign context that signals the smooth functioning of the domestic, a state of affairs underscored by the scene's numerous acts of imaginative making. In addition to Sarah's singing,

which, like Big Boy's, puts voice before body in the announcement and exposition of black character, we soon encounter a second act of music making, when Sarah encourages her crying child to soothe herself by banging a stick against "an old eight-day clock" (126), turning this mechanical artifact into the primordial African musical instrument, the drum, as the child is initiated into the pleasures of rhythmic expression: "with each bang the baby smiled and said, 'Ahh!'" The clock is available for conversion into a percussion instrument because its timekeeping function is largely unnecessary on Sarah's farm, where, as she will later explain to a visitor, the family rises with the sun, retires to the cabin at nightfall, and in general "git[s] erlong widout time" (131). If this remark appears to place the family in an ahistorical, mythic realm of existence, I would suggest instead that its purpose is to dramatize the Marxist principle of uneven development at work in Sarah's rural Mississippi world, a world where the industrial rhythms of standardized clock time, which place the human body at the mercy of the insatiable demands of automated equipment and rationalized labor arrangements, exist alongside the preindustrial regime of agriculture and its diurnal work rhythms. Indeed, the scene may be Wright's way of emphasizing that his black family marches to the beat of its own different drumming, which actively signifies on the modern cadences of the clock, turning its robotic ticking into the "Bang! Bang! Bang!" of an older, more expressive music, remaking received rhythms into joyously conceived ones. In this sense not only music but time itself becomes a product of black making, time kept *on* the clock rather than *by* it.

To the extent that Sarah's body signals its presence on the scene of making, it is desire rather than pain that embodies her. Throughout the scene she yearns not only for the return of her absent husband, Silas, but even more ardently for an earlier, younger lover, Tom, a soldier off fighting in World War I (127–129). Sarah's desire for Tom is so strong that it approaches pain: the mere memory of a long-ago embrace is enough to bring a "sweet ache . . . to her loins" that "had frightened her then [and] was stealing back . . . now with the silence and the cricket calls and the red afterglow and Bang! Bang! Bang!" (128). As the "afterglow" of sunset acquires a sexual charge from Sarah's reveries, the baby's drumbeats synchronize with the throbbing pulse of the mother's erotic imagination.

The stage thus appears to be set for a tale of transgressive, self-aware feminine desire and the complications it introduces into an all-black world: the responsibilities of marriage and family with Silas versus the call of romance and sexual fulfillment with Tom. Sarah's conflicting needs supply the crisis that propels this embryonic story line, opening up a "black hole" that Silas "ha[s] not quite filled" (129) in the marriage. (The sexual symbolism is unmistakable.) Let me repeat that the drama escalating here is strictly internal

to the black community. Unlike "Big Boy," which cannot even mention the swimming hole without registering the vague threat of white anger and violence (20), or "Down by the Riverside," which is hardly under way before the sounds of gunfire evoke a similar threat (64), "Long Black Song" offers no initial hint of a menacing white presence that lurks beyond Sarah's cabin. Wright instead presents a black community-in-miniature confronted with its own problems and contradictions. Had this story been allowed to continue, the result might have been something like Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, another narrative of a young wife and mother facing loneliness within marriage and desires that lead beyond it. Or, within the African American canon, something like Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a contemporaneous tale of unconventional, uncompromising feminine desire set largely in an all-black township equipped with its own distinctive shortcomings as well as its own definitive graces. It is precisely this quality of black life in the round, for better *and* for worse, of course, that Alice Walker has famously praised in Hurston as "racial health": "a sense of black people as complete, complex, *undiminished* human beings, a sense that is lacking in so much black writing and literature" (85). "Long Black Song's" early gestures toward this sense of racial health are important elements in the larger framework of black agency that governs the story's opening pages: what first disturbs the tranquil, pastoral equilibrium of the text is not the work of nature, as in "Down by the Riverside," or the work of hostile, uncomprehending whites, as in "Big Boy," but the work of Sarah's imagination and erotic hunger—the work, that is, of black making.[27]

Unfortunately, this incipient narrative of a desiring black feminine subject is the very first thing to be unmade in "Long Black Song," as the aching throb of Sarah's sexual yearning is first interrupted and then supplanted by the "droning," "dull throb" of an approaching automobile (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 129), which is driven, however, by neither of the black men we might have expected to show up and heighten the story's romantic tension. Instead, a white man gets out, a salesman carrying "a huge black package under his arm." His arrival places Sarah's agency, autonomy, and centrality as a creating, desiring subject in instant jeopardy on at least two distinct but interrelated levels: one economic, one sexual, and both inflected by the racial politics of the early twentieth-century U.S. South.

The unnamed salesman functions as a direct antithesis and foil to Silas as an economic agent. Whereas Silas's journey to town is a centrifugal movement away from the farm that dramatizes his and his family's potential for self-extension into the surrounding world, the salesman comes bearing down on Sarah with all the weight and oppressive force of that world. Moreover, where Silas's journey to market is a proud assertion of the family's status as producers—indeed, as we will later learn, he has invested part of his hand-

some profit on his cotton crop in ten more acres of land, a move that increases the family's productive capacity (139–140)—the salesman is an emissary from the market who appeals to the family's potential as consumers, not producers. Some historians have portrayed the rise of consumer culture and its turn-of-the-century extension to rural areas such as Sarah's Mississippi farm as a modernizing, democratizing force that integrated African Americans more fully into national economic and cultural trends and thus helped pave the way for the civil rights–era energies that finally laid Jim Crow to rest (see Hale; Ownby, *American Dreams*; Daniel, *Lost Revolutions* 121–175). Wright, however, writing during the Depression, presents the coming of consumerism to Sarah's world as an encroachment on black autonomy. Where Silas will return from the market bearing a gift of red fabric for Sarah—an invitation to further making—the salesman brings a luxury item whose promise of pleasure masks its threat to erode the family's precious margin of solvency, to undermine its self-sufficiency, and, perhaps worst of all, to rescind Silas's invitation before the fact, by robbing Sarah of the desire, the capacity, and the motive for making.[28]

The salesman's expensive gadget is a graphophone with a clock built in so that, as he explains to Sarah, "[y]ou can have music and time all at once" (131). Werner Sollors has commented on the clock's role in Wright's work as both symbol and agent of an intrusive "power of modernity" that threatens local worlds, a power "compounded by racial domination" (*Ethnic* 167). This disruptive function is compounded in "Long Black Song" by the analogous work of the graphophone. Music and time, after all, are precisely what Sarah and her daughter already have, what they make for themselves on the farm: Sarah with her voice, the baby with her stick. Wright's tale thus appears to follow the orthodox Marxist critique of alienated labor, though the productive activity in question here is chiefly cultural and expressive rather than strictly industrial or economic. In offering Sarah a commodified version of what she is already demonstrably capable of producing for herself, the salesman invites her to estrange herself from her own creative power, to participate in the objectification of her world of domestic making and in her own unmaking as an economic subject. Wright's account of this process, however, is even closer to Scarry's analysis of capitalist oppression than to the classic Marxian model. For Marx, what made things represent to their makers is the value of the labor they have invested in making it. It is precisely this value that is siphoned away from the maker under the capitalist system of wage labor, which allows the capitalist to purchase the productive capacity of the worker, her ability to create value, at a deep discount. That value remains latent in the commodity, but it can never return in full to the maker, since she does not enjoy ownership of her creation. No amount of labor can close this gap for the worker: as we have already seen in chapter 1, capitalism's crown-

ing injustice is to enlist the creators of value in their own systematic impoverishment and exploitation.

Marx's analysis of this structural expropriation of value is remarkably thorough and nuanced, but he can be cloudier, more abstract, in his attempt to ground value itself. For Marx that ground is ultimately material in the traditional economic sense: the value of an artifact, and of the human labor that goes into its making, lies in the potential of the artifact to be sold, traded, or used. But what makes an object useful? As we have seen, Scarry addresses this question by edging Marx's materialism in a more explicitly somatic direction: the value of the made thing lies above all in its ability to relieve the burden of embodiment and to offer material or imaginative self-extension to its user(s). The artifact holds out to its maker the promise of a degree of disembodiment in reciprocal and more than equal measure to the embodied effort invested in its making. Thus for Scarry the crisis of alienation intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production boils down to the forced diversion of this vast potential for benign disembodiment (or, as Scarry sometimes puts it, for "sentience remade") away from a large population of human beings who have poured their bodily labors into creating that potential and instead toward a tiny coterie of capitalist "owners" who have done little or nothing to create that value yet enjoy its benefits nonetheless (Scarry, *The Body* 258–261; see 260 for a beautifully succinct diagram of this hijacking operation). The result, for the "unreciprocated" mass of workers, is hyper-embodiment and severe world contraction, mitigated just enough by subsistence wages to allow the alienated maker to return for another day or week or month to the scene of her subjection.[29] The result, for the capitalist, is disembodiment in the midst of an ample, expansive, and generous world of objects.[30] Even the artifacts themselves may seem to acquire elements of the lost agency, self-extension, and disembodiment of their dispossessed creators, in the process Marx brilliantly dissected and decried as commodity fetishism.

Which brings us back to "Long Black Song," where the ironies of disembodiment and fetishism govern the complex transaction unfolding between Sarah and the salesman. From the moment the graphophone emerges from its box, for instance, it appears to pulse with a life of its own: "She bent forward, looking. Lawd, but its pretty! She saw the face of the clock under the horn of the graphophone. The gilt on the corners sparkled. The color in the wood glowed softly. It reminded her of the light she saw sometimes in the baby's eyes. Slowly she slid a finger over a beveled edge; she wanted to take the box into her arms and kiss it" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 132). The radiant machine promises and appears to deliver a similar ensoulment to the consumer: as the salesman cranks its handle, Sarah feels her body lifted and transported on "ringing coils of music," first into and then beyond her

world, rising to ecstatic or perhaps even orgasmic heights as her blood surges and "Earth [falls] far behind, forgotten" (132–133). At the same time, the opening line of the recording, a spiritual titled "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder," performs a second-order commodification of music and time that mimics the machine's own: "When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound . . . and time shall be no more" (132; emphasis removed). Before the advent of the salesman, it was Sarah's own voice and imagination that transported her in this way, pushing back the boundaries of her world. Now, that agency has been ceded to the commodity, and it is "the shadowy box that had lifted her up and carried her away" (133), turning disembodiment into a privilege she must pay for.

Clearly, the phonograph has fallen from the lofty place it occupied in chapter 2, where it functioned as a new communications device that revolutionized information storage and as such assisted in the preservation and transmission of vital aural elements of African American expressive culture and the rural lifeworld. "Long Black Song" briefly acknowledges the machine's potential to function in this empowering anthropological manner when the salesman selects a spiritual as the sample recording he plays for Sarah, a recording that at least evokes—if it does not directly enact—deep African American cultural investments in a tradition of sacred song. We could perhaps imagine Sarah going on to broaden and thicken her awareness of her cultural heritage by listening to similar recordings by the Fisk Jubilee Singers or other African American performers, much as interwar bluesmen expanded their musical repertoires and their understanding of the tradition by listening to records on jukeboxes and Victrolas. As we also saw in chapter 2, however, Wright approached modern media formations with skepticism in his writings of the 1930s, treating radio, for instance, with outright suspicion about its totalitarian potential in "Cesspool," a novel project of the period. Like Hurston in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, he expresses concern that broadcast technology could underwrite cultural domination rather than more benign forms of cultural transmission. His reservations about phonography in "Long Black Song," however, lie elsewhere, in a set of concerns that leaves him unable to share Hurston's generally affirmative stance toward the device. Where she responds above all to the phonograph's technological implications and its cultural value as a media extension of the sensory, expressive, and mnemonic faculties, Wright cannot forget that the phonograph is also a consumer product that commodifies these very faculties and moreover incites its user to further consumption through the purchase of recordings that expropriate culture for profit. This same stubborn awareness makes it difficult for Wright to acknowledge the machine's potential as a Scarry-esque artifact offering its user a measure of relief from embodiment. We could say, then,

that whereas Wright's anxieties about radio stem from the medium's vulnerability to the totalitarian power of the contemporary demagogue, his anxieties about the phonograph stem from the machine's direct participation in the totalitarian rule of capital.

As Sarah's desire is rerouted away from Tom and blackness and onto the salesman's fetish object, it also alights on the salesman himself, whom the box seems to endow with some of its mysterious aura: "She saw the strands of his auburn hair glinting in the afterglow. His back bulged against his white shirt as he stooped" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 131–132). A few pages later, she listens to him drink from a gourd, and she hears music, "the faint, soft music of water going down a dry throat, the music of water in a silent night" (135). Sarah tries to defuse the scene's mounting sexual tension by telling herself that her visitor is "jus lika lil boy"—which explains, for one thing, why he would be staring at her breasts (131). But the salesman's magnetism is not so easily denied.[31] Why, for instance, must Sarah repeatedly caution herself that the salesman is "a *white* man. A *white* man" (135, 136), evoking with the phrase the disastrous consequences of an interracial liaison, if not because, on some level at least, she is drawn to the possibility of the encounter? The salesman, then, seems to be emerging as a sexual foil for Tom, or at least as an outlet into which Sarah can release some of her frustrated yearnings for her black lover.

As the salesman's sexual advances become plainer and more aggressive, Wright stages this much-debated scene with calculated ambiguity. As Sarah struggles in the white man's arms, for instance, and the scene pushes toward its climax, the action and imagery at times seem lifted straight from the earlier courting scene with Tom:

> [S]he rode on the curve of white bright days and dark black nights and the surge of the long gladness of summer and the ebb of the deep dream of sleep in winter till a high red wave of hotness drowned her in a deluge of silver and blue that boiled her blood and blistered her flesh. (137)

> Yes; there had been all her life the long hope of white bright days and the deep desire of dark black nights. . . . There had been laughter and eating and singing and the long gladness of green cornfields in summer. There had been cooking and sewing and sweeping and the deep dream of sleeping grey skies in winter. (129)

On the other hand, Sarah repeatedly tries to dodge the salesman's roving hands, pushes him away from her, denies him her lips, tells him no five different times (135–136), and finally goes "limp" in his arms with a "long despairing gasp" when she cannot extricate herself from his embrace (137)—details that strongly suggest we are reading a rape scene. Such conflicting elements make it difficult to tell whether the "*bangbangbang*" that closes the scene is meant to evoke the rhythm of sexual consummation or the violence

of sexual assault, or whether the "liquid metal" that "cover[s]" Sarah at this moment is the white heat of pain or orgasm.

What is increasingly clear, though, is that, however Sarah might interpret what transpires between herself and the white man—and she will eventually claim the act as adulterous sex, as something she "had done" (147, 149) and must therefore accept responsibility for as "her fault" (149)—the salesman's behavior has left little room for her agency, or her consent, as a desiring subject. Quite the contrary: she has become the object of *his* desire. And not merely objectified but explicitly commodified to boot: in the "afterglow" of the encounter the salesman casually knocks down the price of the graphophone by ten dollars (138), effectively prostituting Sarah and completing her unmaking as a sexual subject. By the time the commodity and its custodian have finished performing their degrading magic, black music, time, and sexuality have all been reduced to consumer items, available only for a price.

Small wonder that after her soaring out-of-body experience to the graphophone's accompaniment, Sarah is largely relegated to her body. It is the classic chiasmus of commodity fetishism—as the machine acquires spirit and voice, the working-class woman is gradually deprived of both—grafted onto the established series of reversals that attends black unmaking throughout *Uncle Tom's Children*. In retrospect, all of the volume's familiar warning signs, the omens of unmaking, are present during the salesman's visit: intense embodiment, as the white man's attention shifts from Sarah's buying power to her breasts and lips, and as her own consciousness is engulfed by her surging blood and aching loins; monotonous verbal repetitions, as the initially decorous exchanges between the two parties deteriorate into a crude call-and-response of "Naw!" and "I wont hurt you!" (135–136); the inaudibility of black voice, as Sarah's words of resistance and protest go increasingly unheard; and the world collapse that is symptomatic of immurement in the purely physical: "She could not see the stars now; her eyes were full of the feeling that surged over her body each time she caught her breath" (137). All signal Sarah's devolution from the position of subject and protagonist.

Nor will she ever really regain this position, even after the salesman leaves her bedside with a promise to return in the morning and make his pitch to Silas (138). Indeed, Silas's homecoming, announced in the same paragraph as the white man's departure, leaves her precious little time or opportunity to rise back out of "the weight of her body resting heavily on shucks" and recompose herself as a subject. She will spend the remainder of the tale on the defensive, reacting rather than acting, as Silas quickly discovers her indiscretion (141–144) and events careen out of control from there. We begin to see that the rift introduced by the white salesman goes well beyond the marital discord that erupts upon Silas's return. Again, as in "Down by the River-

side," it extends to the narrative logic and organization of the story itself, disrupting the disposition of character, for the moment Silas glimpses the graphophone by the cabin window (141), the role of protagonist shifts from Sarah to him.[32] He becomes passionately, eloquently voiced, she increasingly silent and inarticulate. The text redirects its focus toward his actions, decisions, and motives; she is left for the most part to witness those actions or reflect on their consequences privately. The meaning of her encounter with the salesman is no longer allowed to register as an exploration of transgressive female desire; it is now primarily something Sarah has done *to Silas*, something he must deal with and she atone for. Consequently he horsewhips Sarah for her misstep, plunging her embodiment into outright, searing physical pain for the first time in the story (144).

This act completes the contamination of domestic space begun by the salesman's invasion of the marital bedroom.[33] From the moment Silas's whip "burn[s] its way" into her back, Sarah, along with the narrative perspective that follows her, never reenters the cabin. She spends the night on a neighboring hillside, enveloped in a "solid," disorienting darkness (146) that shields her from her husband's rage but also hints at some absolute degree of world contraction as her pain and loss multiply. From that slope the cabin is merely "a dark smudge in a sea of shifting shadows," already half-unmade as the marriage splinters (147). The next morning she will watch as the showdown between Silas and the salesman over the graphophone—and implicitly, of course, over her—turns violent and Silas shoots the white man from the cabin's porch (150). And she will watch again as Silas retreats to the cabin to shoot it out with the white mob that comes to exact vengeance for the salesman's killing (154–156).[34] At no point does Sarah or the reader reoccupy that space. Indeed, Sarah's one attempt to return to the house and resume her domestic role is thwarted by Silas himself, who explicitly blocks her way (151). In this respect, the Poe-esque implosion that ends the story, as the cabin, with Silas in it, collapses in flames set by the mob (156), is but anticlimax. The cabin's accessibility and potential as a domestic interior and ground of making are in effect over at the instant the husband's whip falls against his wife.

The wedge that whiteness has driven between Sarah and Silas is thus more than emotional, more than sexual, more even than domestic, in Scarry's broad philosophical application of the term. It is *structural*, wrenching a female-centered erotic quest narrative into a violent male-driven revenge plot.[35] Sarah's eclipse from a narrative subject position that instigates action and generates meaning can be traced in the sequence of the character pairings that occupy the textual foreground: first Sarah and the baby in their pastoral idyll (125–126); then Sarah and Tom in her fantasy (127–129); then Sarah and the salesman (129–138); then Sarah and Silas as the recriminations fly (139–148); but then Silas and the salesman, locked in struggle (149–150);

and finally Silas and the mob that descends on his cabin (154–156). Where we might have had *The Awakening* or *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, we end up with something more like "Blood Burning Moon," Jean Toomer's 1923 story of unruly black feminine desire short-circuited by interracial competition and violence between men.

Despite the narrative tyranny it exerts over Sarah's role in the story, however, Silas's ascension as protagonist is significant in its own right. For one thing, it allows Wright to develop a black character capable, as Sarah is not, of resisting the allure of the commodity. While it is true that Silas does a little shopping for his wife in town, his first act upon learning that the salesman has discounted the graphophone for Sarah is to hurl the box out the front door, as if to rid the house of its corrupting influence (142). Later, other objects will follow this same path: evicting Sarah from the homeplace, Silas pitches the red cloth and new shoes he has just brought her, along with the cradle and Sarah's and Ruth's clothes, out into the yard (151). It is as if, understanding intuitively how objects approach the status of weapons when commodified, turning on their makers and indeed on the entire class of producers, he responds by directing an equal and opposite violence against the objects themselves: for the maker to reclaim agency, the commodity as such must first be unmade, cast out of the domestic realm so that unalienated making has some chance to continue there. That he tosses Sarah out as well may reflect the extent to which he senses, or fears, that she too has been commodified by the salesman's Midas touch.

Even more important is the way Silas meets the salesman's racial and economic authority and answers the brute force of the mob. In a pair of important essays, Abdul JanMohamed draws on the historian Orlando Patterson's model of slavery as an institutionalization of "social death" in order to demonstrate the persistence of the social conditions and arrangements typical of slavery into the Jim Crow era. From slavery's hazy origins on ancient battlefields as a means of dealing with captured enemy warriors, the slave has been understood to exist and serve under an indefinitely commuted death sentence that can be instantly reinstated and executed at the master's whim. Thus, slaves enjoy only the remotest trace of social existence. They live on but are utterly negated as persons, in effect already dead; this is what Patterson means by social death. In the zero-sum game that is the politics of identity in slave societies, any act of self-assertion by slaves is a direct encroachment on the very identity of the masters, since, as we saw in chapter 1, the timocratic institutions that invariably accompany slavery define the honor of the master class in direct opposition to the fundamental honorlessness and social invisibility of slaves. Moreover, under this hegemonic system, once the slave "comes to accept himself as a 'socially dead' person, as an object, then that part of himself that strives for emancipation has to struggle against the part

that has accepted his own death," in an especially cruel instance of Du Boisian double consciousness (JanMohamed, "Rehistoricizing" 201).

Wright's project, according to JanMohamed, was to assist in the latter-day slave's "dialectical overcoming of his condition by bringing to consciousness the structures of his social death in the symbolic realm of literature" ("Negating" 300). As we might expect, that dialectical process unfolds in three stages. First, the black victim of slavery's compulsory nonexistence must "recognize his powerlessness," "his emasculation and death" ("Rehistoricizing" 202). Then "he will have to recognize his own agency in his emasculation." And last, "he will have to destroy or effectively overcome his own formation" "to annihilate his old self and (re)form another one" (202). But how is the emancipatory self-overcoming to be achieved, especially when, as JanMohamed notes, following Ralph Ellison, the difficulty of "access to . . . the master's culture" (202) compounds the difficulty of reforming the self "in the discursive field" of language and expression and the only alternative response would appear to be violence, which can rarely if ever work to the slave's advantage since the master class typically controls the means of violence as well as the means of culture? JanMohamed argues that Wright's innovation in *Uncle Tom's Children* was to see *actual* death as a legitimate and even preferable response to social death on the part of his black characters. "The willing acceptance of death functions as the most viable form of liberation" ("Rehistoricizing" 192) in Wright's fiction, "the only way" in the existentially circumscribed world of Jim Crow, which simply carries on the work of slavery under another name, "of negating the negation" that is social death (192).[36]

According to JanMohamed, Wright actively shapes his volume with an eye toward delineating and differentiating the steps in this process. *Uncle Tom's Children* first turns to autobiography to demonstrate "the formation and confinement of the black subject in the realm of 'social death'" ("Rehistoricizing" 205) in a series of verbal snapshots that "depicts the hegemonic process without analyzing it theoretically" (206). Wright then turns to the counterfactual realm of fiction to depict "the gradually emerging liberation" of his black subjects "through the positive functioning of death" (205). The five short stories of the collection "begin to portray an increasingly aware, deliberate, and organized counterassertion by blacks," one that "develops slowly, painfully, and incompletely" through the early tales, with false starts and missteps along the way (210). At first, death is largely accidental and reactive, not yet consciously recognized and embraced as a mode of resistance. The deaths of Lester, Buck, and Bobo, for instance, seem to hold little if any value for the boys themselves, but they do for Big Boy, as horrific symbols of "the constant pressure of commuted death and . . . the rapidity and arbitrariness with which the commutation can be revoked" (213). It is much the

same in "Down by the Riverside" where, JanMohamed argues, Mann's fatalism and passive acquiescence to the social forces that destroy him signal that "he has profoundly internalized the racist hegemony" and lacks "even . . . the will to escape" (215). "Having accepted social death and renounced power" (216), Mann doesn't resist so much as react instinctively to fight-or-flight situations. He is left only with the largely illusory choice between a voluntary and involuntary death (218).

In this context, "Long Black Song" is the turning point in *Uncle Tom's Children*, and Silas the volume's pivotal character. Where JanMohamed sees Sarah as "an amorphous, apolitical consciousness" struggling to negotiate "social boundaries," Silas is "a focused consciousness, which, though not yet politically sophisticated, is perfectly cognizant of the modes of the hegemonic system" that enforces southern neoslavery ("Rehistoricizing" 218), and as such he proves able to resist it. He possesses "a hard, clear-headed understanding" of Jim Crow *as* a "structure of social death." He explains to Sarah, "They take yo land! They take yo freedom! They take yo women! N then they take yo life" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 152). Moreover, Silas is aware of his complicity in his own emasculation and manages to renounce it. After he kills the salesman, Sarah urges him to flee the scene with her, to become a fugitive and nonentity. He refuses, however, to be a willing partner in his own invisibility: "Ahm gonna be hard like they is! So hep me, Gawd, Ah'm gonna be *hard!* When they come fer me Ah'm gonna *be* here! N when they git me outta here theys gonna *know* Ahm gone! Ef Gawd lets me live Ahm gonna make em *feel* it!" (152–153). Silas's words movingly capture his insistence on existing, on occupying space, on his presence and substance as a *subject* willing to die "for personal honor and pride" (JanMohamed, "Rehistoricizing" 220), to make of that death a negation of social death. He stands his ground not simply to kill his killers but, in killing and dying, to repudiate what they stand for.[37] Even his silence becomes a mode of self-assertion: as the cabin burns, Sarah waits to hear him call out or scream, only to realize that he has "stayed on to burn . . . without a murmur" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 156), denying his killers the satisfaction of any display of weakness, desperation, or pain.

What this all means for a neomaterialist analysis is at least threefold. First, Scarry's insistence on locating power in the material domain of the body and (un)making, on tracing the origins of injustice and oppression to the brute facticity of pain, injury, and object deprivation, offers a useful corrective to JanMohamed's somewhat abstract characterization of the southern regime of social death as hegemonic. In *Uncle Tom's Children*, this regime isn't really hegemonic at all—at least not in Antonio Gramsci's sense of hegemony as securing the consent of the governed primarily through persuasion and culture—but is explicitly repressive and coercive.[38] Characters

such as Big Boy and Mann, after all, don't bow down, or run away, or give up, because of anything they have read in a book or heard on the radio, let alone anything some intellectual might have taught or told them, but because they have been systematically bludgeoned into submission—or, for a brief moment in each case, into shooting back. At the same time, in framing Silas's death as a dialectical negation of a negation, JanMohamed calls attention to the way that under the right conditions, unmaking can be a creative rather than merely destructive or deconstructive force. Silas's act of resistance turns injury and pain—which he inflicts on others *and* which he willingly suffers—into vehicles of self-reconstruction and liberation from social death as he ironically, subversively turns to violence to extend himself into a world that denies him being. This potentially creative dimension of unmaking is underdeveloped in Scarry and, as we will see, is of enormous importance in the stories that follow "Long Black Song." Silas's stand against Jim Crow *and* capitalist oppression may be the first fully developed instance in Wright's work of violence as ontogenesis, a theme that will fascinate him throughout the remainder of his career in fiction.[39]

Finally, JanMohamed's appeal to the martial origins of slavery and his characterization of master-slave relations as "a sublated state of war" ("Re-historicizing" 194) help illuminate yet another side of Silas's decision to go down fighting. From its beginning, *Uncle Tom's Children* has presented Jim Crow race relations as a state of perpetual war. The volume's opening scene, of course, is the juvenile race war of cinders and bottles. Jim Harvey, the white man who shoots Lester and Buck before Big Boy cuts him down with his own rifle, is a soldier on leave from his regiment, roaming his father's woods in uniform (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 42–43). "Down by the Riverside" is crawling with soldiers and guardsmen of all ranks, commandeering boats, stalking the levee, supervising the rescue and evacuation operations, administering martial law, and dispensing summary justice. "Long Black Song" refers to the returning veterans of World War I (140), one of whom, Tom, is the first black soldier to receive specific mention in the collection. Tom, however, appears nowhere in the real-time action of the story. In this respect, he is relegated to much the same absence and invisibility as the thousands of other black veterans of his time whose contributions to U.S. war efforts went willfully unrecognized by whites on the home front, who sought to return them to Jim Crow subordination upon their homecoming. It falls, then, to Silas to fulfill the role of black soldier evoked in the apocryphal figure of Tom, to respond to the indignities and mistreatments of Jim Crow with the new postwar militancy of his generation.[40] Certainly the shootout at the cabin is staged as a battle scene, with clearly demarcated lines, and troops advancing, retreating, and falling on the field of honor—the grown-up version of cinders and bottles, though this time it is the black war-

rior who is able to exploit the strategic position offered by his homeplace and pick off the enemy one by one. The scene is narrated from a great distance, through Sarah's remote perspective, giving it the panoramic sweep and scale typical of contemporary cinematic depictions of battle—think, for instance, of D. W. Griffith's Civil War scenes in *The Birth of a Nation*, also from the World War I era. And Sarah's response to the violence before her echoes nearly word for word her earlier skeptical reflections on the subject of war:

> Yes, killing of white men by black men and killing of black men by white men went on in spite of the hope of white bright days and the desire of dark black nights. . . . And when killing started it went on, like a red river flowing. Oh, she felt sorry for Silas! . . . He was following that long river of blood . . . knowing that it meant nothing. (153–154)

> Nothing good could come from men going miles across the seas to fight. N how come they wanna kill each other? How come they wanna make blood? Killing was not what men ought to do. (127)

This gendered critique of war and violence will resonate powerfully in the volume's final stories, where Wright and his characters search for a better way.

For now, however, I will focus on one final aspect of Silas's one-man campaign against the white regime. Up to this point I have described the Jim Crow South as represented in *Uncle Tom's Children* as a gigantic structure of aversiveness, a kind of torture chamber writ large for African Americans. Except for brief reflexive gestures by Big Boy and Mann, the path of unmaking—what Scarry sometimes calls the path of the weapon—has run in one direction only, and the black unmaking that I have posited as the paradigmatic end point of each story is an almost exclusively objectifying phenomenon. Silas's act upsets this textual status quo. Single-handedly transforming the nonreciprocal injuring and unmaking of torture into the reciprocal, consensual injuring and unmaking of war (Scarry, *The Body* 63–69), he turns the tables on his white persecutors, reversing the path of the weapon like some angry black god come to rain down hurt on the backsliding hordes that have low-rated and offended him. As such, he alters the volume's basic narrative formula, bringing a sense of subjective agency to the black unmaking toward which the tale relentlessly drives: a black *unmaker* rather than a black *unmade*. In this way, "Long Black Song" offers its own spin on the time-honored strain of African American thought that has embraced military service, the warrior's role, as a means of black access to fuller participation and greater recognition in U.S. civic life.[41] For centuries, fighting in America's wars (and sometimes fighting for the *right* to fight in them) was an integral part of the larger black campaign for citizenship. Silas's war on one level continues this tradition while on another it exposes its bitter ironies.

From the abject victimization of torture to the more complex, ambivalent subjectivity of the warrior: the next step on this path toward creative unmaking will be a revolutionary consciousness that Scarry, despite her affiliations with Marxism, can take us only so far toward understanding.

How to Unmake an Uncle Tom: "Fire and Cloud"

It is tempting to read Sarah's final agonized cry of "Naw, Gawd!" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 156) not only as an ironic recapitulation of the ineffectual words with which she tried to ward off the advances of the salesman (136), but as the story's definitive version of the long black song of its title. If so, we can no longer read that song as a lullaby, for it now stands revealed as something much more like a blues, what Houston A. Baker Jr. might call an expressive response to the economics of slavery (*Blues* 13), as those economics carry forward into the twentieth century and are manifested in the sexual strong-arm tactics of the salesman and the even more blatant assault of the mob. In "Long Black Song" the sexually freighted relationship between Sarah and Tom is repeated with a difference, a gathering intensity, in the interaction between Sarah and the salesman, before yielding to a third encounter, between Silas and the salesman, that offers resolution of a sort for this sexual tension by transposing it into a new, more explicitly political register or "key." This structure loosely mimics the AA′B scheme that emerged in the wake of W. C. Handy's bestselling blues compositions as the genre's most popular verse form, but the AA′B structure may apply even more precisely to the volume as a whole.

The 1940 edition of *Uncle Tom's Children* begins with a pair of texts that describe the destructive impact of Jim Crow on the bodies and souls of two black children, Richard and Big Boy, who nevertheless manage somehow to survive this all-out assault on their existence and to escape the South altogether. The next pair of stories, as we have seen, recapitulates and intensifies this narrative scheme, all the way down to its tripartite structure of black making–white intrusion–black unmaking, as white violence this time proves fatal for the young husbands and family men of "Down by the Riverside" and "Long Black Song" and the body count rises around them. And, as we are about to see, the final pair of stories, starting with "Fire and Cloud," approximates the anchoring function of the blues B line in the way it answers the call of the earlier pairs in an antiphonal voice that pushes the volume toward a resolution that is cautiously optimistic if hardly definitive. In their narrative structure and trajectory, their choice of protagonist, and their now overt Marxist emphasis, these stories end the collection on a new and different note. This antiphonal dimension extends to the role of pain, injury, and unmaking in the narratives as well.

Early on, "Fire and Cloud" announces its deviation from the paradigmatic narrative form introduced in the earlier stories. Though once more the story begins with the italicized voice of its protagonist, this time chanting a popular black proverb as the Reverend Dan Taylor makes his way home to his family and congregation at day's end, this time there can be no question of an autonomous utopian realm of black making, however short-lived, because even as his words float "up out of the depths of his body" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 157), a troubling white presence is already embedded in the lines of Taylor's song: "A naughts a naught / N fives a figger / All fer the white man / N none fer the nigger."[42] What is more, Taylor has just come from a disturbing meeting in town, where he has been stonewalled by a petty functionary, a "snow-white" woman "like cold marble," with "icily white spectacles" and a "dry, metallic voice" (158), who remains deaf to his pleas for relief for his hungry people. He is awaited at home not only by his wife and grown son and his anxious parishioners, but by a pair of communist labor organizers, Hadley and Green, and by a white delegation led by the mayor and bent on dissuading Taylor from leading a march the next morning to protest the local food shortage. From the outset, then, the world of "Fire and Cloud" is thoroughly interracial. It is also thoroughly problematic, racked by the forced scarcity created by the Agricultural Adjustment Act, a well-meaning but flawed New Deal program that lined the pockets of the Mississippi Delta's wealthiest landowners for taking millions of acres of cropland out of production while the rural poor often fought to keep starvation at bay.[43] Once again, as throughout the volume, second-class citizenship is attended by hyper-embodiment as its symptom and cause. Unjust distribution, the unheard voices of the oppressed, the crippling embodiment that severe hunger brings—"Fire and Cloud" opens squarely in the midst of a pervasive unmaking that reaches the working-class white community right alongside Taylor's own.

And this climate of unmaking grows even more pronounced and toxic as the story progresses. For what follows Taylor's game of musical chairs with his various audiences is the most acutely embodied scene in *Uncle Tom's Children*, perhaps in all U.S. literature. After temporizing with the mayor and his thugs and debating the pros and cons of demonstrating with the church elders, Taylor is called outside to speak with some white men at his front gate, only to be sucker-punched, hustled into a waiting car, beaten and kicked some more, and driven to the woods outside of town, where, surrounded by the "blurred white faces" of his attackers (197), he is tied to a tree and brutally whipped (197–201). The scene is even more unbearable, more difficult to read, than Bobo's lynching. It seems to go on forever, narrated, moment by agonizing moment, not from the perspective of a witness, as in "Big Boy Leaves Home," but directly out of the victim's own searing sentience, trav-

eling the entire sensory spectrum from paralysis and numbness to molten, debilitating pain and the terrible hyper-awareness of the body's vulnerability to it: "He stripped to his waist and stood trembling. A night wind cooled his sweaty body; he was conscious of his back as he had never been before, conscious of every square inch of black skin there" (198). The scene gathers the trappings of its violence from earlier stories—the pedagogical function of pain from "Ethics" (the whipping as "a nigger-lesson"; 197), the rope from "Big Boy," and the torture device itself, of course, from "Long Black Song"—and then condenses them to an absolute nadir of bodily horror.

Here Wright's analysis of the structure of torture is even more sophisticated than in "Big Boy," as sophisticated, in its own way, as Scarry's. He takes us deep into the intricacies of the process Scarry calls analogical verification, in which the material attributes of pain, in the broken body and voice of the torture victim, are lifted away from that person and appropriated instead as "insignia of power" for a regime that might otherwise appear to lack the authority and aura of reality that the body confers (*The Body* 13–14, 56–59).[44] In just this way, Taylor's torturers seize control of his body, voice, and pain to prop up their fictions of white supremacy. As the whip falls and pain consumes him in its "living flame," he feels himself losing command over his body, which "leap[s] as of itself, as though it were his but he could not control it any longer" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 199). And though he does his best to clench his teeth and say nothing to his torturers, to resist their taunting and goading and make of his silence, as Silas did, a mode of resistance, the pain proves too much for him, and he "sob[s]" and "scream[s]," feeling "his breath leaving his lungs, going out from him" (200) and over to his white assailants, who force him to recite the Lord's Prayer. As their voices grow louder and more insistent, settling into the familiar monotony of unmaking ("'Goddam your black soul, pray!' . . . 'You going to pray? You want me to beat you till you *cant* pray?' . . . 'Pray, then! Goddam you, pray!' . . . 'Aint you going to pray?' . . . 'Pray, nigger! Pray like you *mean* it!' . . . 'Goddam your black heart, *pray*!' "; 199–200), and as even the whip gains a voice of its own with each maddening *whick!* (198–201), Taylor's own voice begins to quiver and crack, the words of his prayer disintegrating into phonemes, the mere matter of speech: "Ttthine kkkindom ccome . . . Ttthy wwill bbe ddddone" (200).

According to Scarry, it makes little difference to the regime what the victims of torture actually say while under "interrogation." Indeed, the fiction that torture is conducted in order to extract useful information from enemies of the state is the act's most pernicious, mendacious premise (*The Body* 28–29). In truth, virtually any word, howl, or groan on the victim's part will serve the real purpose of the so-called confession in the structure of torture: to dramatize the gap between the torturer's cool, untroubled possession of

language, which doubles as possession of self and world, and the victim's diminishing grasp of any and all of these resources (see especially 35–37). In the logic of torture, this gap is ultimately the distance between power and powerlessness, all the more so when, as in "Fire and Cloud," the victim is forced to rehearse words at his torturer's command, "objectify[ing] the fact that while the prisoner has almost no voice . . . the torturer and the regime have doubled their voice, since the prisoner is now speaking their words" (36). As such, Taylor's prayer, an "assent to words that through the thick agony of the body can be only dimly heard," amounts to a confession only that "all is almost gone now, there is almost nothing left now, even this voice, the sounds that I am making, no longer form my words but the words of another" (35).[45]

Yet for all this Taylor's persecutors have chosen the words they demand from him carefully, for their pedagogical as well as political impact. By forcing Taylor first to kneel and then to pray, to enact the material gestures that define him as a Christian believer and a preacher, while they continue to lay on the lash, they compel him to demonstrate and to endure the consequences of the inadequacy of his religious faith. The object of this "nigger-lesson," in other words, is to show Taylor that his prayers will go unanswered, that God will not put a stop to the pain, that as one of the mayor's cronies has already warned him (and as Mann learned in "Down by the Riverside"), in the segregated South the whites are the real gods, the disembodied figures who judge and condemn one for backsliding from the white Word and breaking the commandments of Jim Crow—the ones who, indeed, have appropriated the technology of analogical verification favored by the primary Artifact.[46] Taylor's torturers want him to see that it is ultimately to them, and not to God, that he kneels and prays.[47] Moreover, by punctuating this lesson with the iconic instrument of plantation discipline, they supplement the choreography of Christian belief with the choreography of chattel slavery, making Taylor mimic the bondsman's abject posture before the master's lash. In this way Taylor's coerced performance of cringing servility and naïve piety is meant to edge him toward the stereotypical image of the Uncle Tom.[48]

Or perhaps to unmask him as one. For it must be said that there has been a bit of the Tom about Taylor from the beginning of "Fire and Cloud." Wright critic Keneth Kinnamon puts it less diplomatically, calling Taylor "a fully realized Uncle Tom" (103) who "plays the role with consummate skill" but ultimately finds "the situation . . . simply too complex for his abilities" (104). His decidedly nonmilitant brand of Christian fortitude stresses patience, passivity, and resignation. After leading his flock in a long antiphonal prayer that is as beautiful and ineffectual as Elder Murray's supplication in "Down by the Riverside" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 166–168; cf. 71–73), Taylor urges them to wait for a sign from God before demonstrating. Urged by the

communist organizers to confront the mayor directly about the food shortage, he protests that such assertiveness would be "too much like war!," "jus like civil war!" (177), though, as Hadley points out, the armed police force that awaits the marchers in town would already seem to justify the analogy. Admittedly, Taylor is in a difficult situation with the white officials, but there is a disquieting hint of Tom-ish shuffle and weave in his dealings with the mayor, who plays Morrie to the police chief's bristling Pease (183; cf. 6). Even his parishioners chafe at Taylor's political quietism (168–169). In this context, Taylor's compulsory pantomime of Uncle Tomism for the whites may simply underscore the degree to which he has been playing into their hands all along.

What does not seem to occur to Taylor's kidnappers, however, is that they are isolating the most passive and servile elements of his character while applying the world-destroying properties of physical pain. The risk they run, in other words, is that the act of torture will backfire on them, that instead of making an Uncle Tom they will unmake one, will destroy precisely the qualities of supplicant and slave that they have forced on Taylor with the lash. They are also, almost literally, playing with fire in directing pain's sheer aversiveness, its intrinsic property of "against," toward a persona whose passivity and indecision have, up to this point in the story, played largely into white hands. As the preceding scenes with his flock, the mayor's delegation, and the communist leaders make clear, Taylor has to this point comported himself with supreme—we might even say debilitating—tact, carefully controlling his demeanor and his words so as not to appear antagonistic to any of his audiences. He takes pains, that is, not to seem to be "against" anyone or anything, which for all its value as a survival skill only adds to his general aura of Tomism. The pain of the torture session, however, breaks down these defenses, introducing Taylor to aversiveness in its rawest and most undeniable form. But along the way, in the intimacy of the encounter with his assailants, that aversiveness is rerouted from the devastating closed loop that Scarry describes—my body is hurting me, my body is *against* me—along the linear path of the weapon. The proximity, hostility, and sheer intrusiveness of Taylor's persecutors give the aversiveness of his pain a concrete object and focus. Rather than collapsing onto him, it explodes outward onto them.

This accounts for the otherwise puzzling fact that at the height of his beating, Taylor breaks out of the ventriloquism of unmaking, cutting short his prayer and turning verbally on his tormentors, *against* whom he swears vengeance: "We'll git yuh white trash some day! So hep me Gawd, we'll git yuh!" (201).[49] Significantly, what Taylor does *not* say here is that God will punish these men; their object lesson in the futility of prayer has succeeded in teaching him otherwise. Just as significantly, he stops his recitation of the Lord's Prayer just before reaching the part about forgiving the sins of one's enemies.

Otherworldly justice will not suffice. Neither will mercy. Taylor demands, and vows, nothing less than justice in the here and now—on earth as it is in heaven. Moreover, his use of the first-person plural—*we'll* get you someday—signals that the justice he seeks is not merely personal but collective. This all suggests that the streak of fire the whip has etched into Taylor's skin has not disfigured so much as delivered him, igniting the first flickerings of a revolutionary consciousness: activist, militant, and thoroughly social.[50]

The unmaking of this Uncle Tom has its roots, of course, in the earlier awakening and emancipation of Silas in "Long Black Song." Indeed, the staging of Silas's rebellion first in front of and then inside his modest wooden dwelling may be the author's way—or the character's own—of signifying on the racist stereotype of the cabin-bound Tom, who is content with whatever mere semblance of a life the white masters deign to allow him. The shots that ring out from within the domestic space drive the message home: no Uncle Toms in *this* cabin!—a point Wright punctuates by burning the structure down. Taylor's emergent activism, however, with its collective emphasis, represents an advance on Silas's defiant individualism.[51] Ironically, it is Sarah and not Silas who comes closest to such a collective vision in "Long Black Song." Reflecting on the race war about to break out before her, she muses on the deeper relationships underlying the surface violence and discord: "Somehow, men, black men and white men, land and houses, green cornfields and grey skies, gladness and dreams, were all a part of that which made life good. Yes, somehow, they were linked, like the spokes in a spinning wagon wheel. She felt they were. She knew they were. She felt it when she breathed and knew it when she looked. But she could not say how; she could not put her finger on it and when she thought hard about it it became all mixed up, like milk spilling suddenly" (154).

Taylor, by contrast, puts his finger on it. His advance over Sarah is to take her private, only half-articulated thoughts and make them public and eloquent, pushing them toward a fully worked-out mode of social analysis and collective action that will come to fruition when he leads the interracial throng of marchers, thousands strong, into town and wins concessions from the rattled mayor (218–220). Moreover, the story suggests that Taylor is in a position to achieve this success not only because of his own transformation but because of a parallel transformation among the black and white poor, whose shared hunger seems to have gnawed away at the racial suspicion and antagonism that presumably kept them from marching together in the past (cf. Miller 193–194).[52] We thus see once again how the body's incommensurably private pain, the legacy of unmaking, can be redirected toward creative and collective ends—and how the aversiveness that pain introduces can be redirected against one's oppressors. As Taylor tells Jimmy, his son, "We cant do nothin erlone. . . . We gotta git wid the *people*, son. . . . Wes los when wes er-

lone! . . . Theys the ones whut mus be real t us! Gawds wid the people! N the peoples gotta be real as Gawd t us!" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 209–210). Taylor thus takes Sarah's rudimentary communism and pushes it toward activism, even as he takes Silas's activist resistance and pushes it toward collectivism. He thus takes a huge step toward resolving the rift in black characterization and consciousness opened up by the salesman in "Long Black Song." On all counts, the unmaking of this Uncle Tom and the consequent radicalization of his people have been creative destruction of the highest order.

Because Scarry sees unmaking as the definitive example of the unethical, there is little in her study that would prepare us to confront the progressive dimension or creative function of either unmaking or aversiveness. As Taylor and his congregation know, however, there is a biblical precedent for this function, in the idea of a Christian millennium that brings creative destruction on a cosmic scale: "Lawd, . . . Yuh said Yuhd destroy this ol worl n create a new Heaven n a new Earth!" (167). A similar millennial faith in creative deconstruction informs the Marxist theory of revolution, in which the dominant system of production and the ruling social class together prepare the material conditions for their own overthrow.[53] Scarry has a great deal to say about Marx's analysis of the commodity form and his critique of capitalist production, but much less to say about his idea of revolution, its intrinsic modalities of contradiction, violence, and unmaking—only about the distributive justice that is to be its outcome. Both visions of millennial unmaking, Christian and Marxist, converge during the demonstration, where, as Taylor watches through welling eyes, "the sky trembled; the buildings wavered as if about to topple; and the earth shook" (220). For this moment, at least, Christian faith is not an opiate of the masses but a social gospel in action, and Marxism not godless propaganda but a way of making God's purpose real in the world.[54] At this moment, Taylor realizes, "Gawd ain no lie!" He may have seemed so, a fiction of the worst kind, only pages before, when the reverend, making his halting way home after his beating, cries out "Speak t me Lawd!" and is immediately accosted by a white policeman (204–205)—the same lesson in religious worship and white power he has just been force-fed in the woods. No wonder he confesses to Jimmy shortly afterward that it "[s]eems like Gawds done lef me" (208). But at the demonstration, God is made real in the living presence—the bodies and actions—of committed believers: analogical verification with a vengeance.[55] This in turn leads to Taylor's final, Leninist/Nietzschean epiphany that there is strength in numbers and "[f]reedom belongs t the strong!" (220; emphasis removed).[56]

In the thrilling alchemy of the story's conclusion, even the fire that scalds Taylor is transformed from a sign of God's abdication or indifference into a sign of his work in history, the very sign that Taylor insisted on waiting for before taking action on behalf of his people (168). Where it once limned the

privacy of Taylor's pain, the absolute distance between his writhing body and the untroubled sentience of his torturers, the image now opens outward into communal and typological dimensions. When Taylor learns, for instance, that other members of his congregation have also been beaten and abused on the night of his whipping (213–214), he realizes that his burning agony does not isolate him from his brothers and sisters, as Scarry might have it, so much as connect him to their suffering and shame. "Ah know whut yo life is," he tells them (218). "Ah done felt it! Its *fire*! Its like the fire that burned me las night! Its sufferin! Its hell! Ah cant bear this fire erlone! Ah know now whut t do! Wes gotta git close t one ernother! Gawds done spoke! Gawds done sent His sign." Contra Scarry, nothing at this moment is quite as real to Taylor as the pain of others.

Moreover, as his audience immediately recognizes, this burning sign has appeared before, in the biblical pillar of fire and cloud that guarded the ark of God's covenant and led the Hebrews through the wilderness toward the promised land (see Exodus 40). This fire, in its own way, is an icon of creative destruction: a consuming flame in which, as we have seen in Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, a diasporic population was slowly forged into a people. Clearly, Wright means to show something similar at work at the demonstration, in the formation and mobilization of a collective class consciousness; for both writers, the Mosaic narrative offers a way to talk about African American experience, community, and political activism in the thirties. As the demonstrators pick up the strains of the old hymn memorializing the wilderness theophany for their marching song—"So the sign of the fire by night / N the sign of the cloud by day / A-hoverin oer / Jus befo / As we journey on our way" (218; emphasis removed)—Taylor at once feels, follows, and *is* this fire, leading his flock toward the mayor's promise of food (manna from heaven!) as his own revolutionary consciousness becomes thoroughly socialized, a no-longer discrete identity melting and merging into the "many limbed, many-legged, many-handed crowd that was he" (219).[57] This same fire has reforged Taylor's family, once riven by misunderstandings and recriminations, into a functioning unit, marching side by side into battle (218), and his once bickering congregation into a church militant that sweeps into town with the elemental force of a "sea" (220). It thus reaches back to redeem the fires that swept through earlier stories and consumed the Morrison house, Silas and Sarah's cabin, and Bobo's mutilated body, much as the imagery of the biblical cloud and collective "sea" may be Wright's way of recasting the destructive rainstorms and flood of "Down by the Riverside" in a more hopeful key. It is as if Taylor's entire world—the volume's entire world, really—must be contracted to the width of his shoulders and laid upon his burning back before it can open out again, remade. Wright underscores his story's break with form, its reversed path from unmaking

through creative destruction to triumphant remaking, by placing his protagonist atop a quickly improvised platform of planks and sawhorses to deliver his climactic speech to the demonstrators (216). This crude pulpit of construction materials, evoking an almost primordial context of material creation, manages to position Taylor within both Marxist and religious iconographies of making, as a laboring producer and a Christ-like carpenter-teacher.[58] Despite her relative silence on creative unmaking, I can think of no philosophical framework better suited than Scarry's to illuminate this surprising rapprochement between communism and Judeo-Christianity and to establish its basis in the history and ethical orientation of Western materialism.

How to Unmake an Aunt Jemima: "Bright and Morning Star"

Wright concludes the 1940 edition of *Uncle Tom's Children* with another tale of the fortuitous unmaking that ushers in a black revolutionary consciousness. As "Bright and Morning Star" opens, however, the protagonist, Sue, is, as an activist subject, already half-remade. A laundress by trade, Sue is the widowed mother of two sons, Sug and Johnny-Boy, who are members of a Communist Party cell in northern Mississippi near Memphis. Sug has been in jail for a year; Johnny-Boy continues to organize and recruit for the party. Together, the boys have begun to instruct Sue in the tenets of Marxism, "a new and terrible vision" to replace the Christian love and forbearance of Sue's youth (225), a religious worldview long under assault by the "cold white mountain" of Jim Crow oppression (224). Where "Fire and Cloud" stressed the common ground between Judeo-Christianity and Marxism as liberation ideologies, here Wright presents the two systems as serial rather than complementary or even necessarily compatible stages in the formation of a new political awareness: "day by day her sons had ripped from her startled eyes her old vision, and image by image had given her a new one, different, but great and strong enough to fling her into the light of another grace. The wrongs and sufferings of black men had taken the place of Him nailed to the Cross; the meager beginnings of the party had become another Resurrection; and the hate of those who would destroy her new faith had quickened in her a hunger to feel how deeply her new strength went" (225).[59] Still, Sue remains liminal, a work in progress as a political subject, still feeling the vestigial pull of her obsolete belief: "sometimes . . . the past and present would become mixed in her; while toiling under a strange star for a new freedom the old songs would slip from her lips with their beguiling sweetness" (226). But the arc traced by her experience is a familiar one after "Fire and Cloud": an initially problematic orientation is "shattered" by the intrusion of "the white folks and their laws" (224), before giving way to a more radicalized world-

view. The remainder of "Bright and Morning Star" will retrace this broad arc along bolder, more dramatic, but also more ironic lines.

As in "Fire and Cloud," the world of "Bright and Morning Star" is interracial from the start. The party cell is integrated, and one of the white comrades, a young woman named Reva, is in love with Johnny-Boy, a fact that pleases Sue even though it represents the same volatile combination of gender, race, and sex that ignited the violence of "Big Boy Leaves Home." Unlike "Fire and Cloud," however, Sue's story begins in a rich realm of making, one that rivals the opening scene of "Long Black Song" in its iconic domesticity. The setting is Sue's kitchen, the quintessential domestic space (strangely absent from the pages of "Long Black Song"). A pot of greens bubbles on the stove (221) as Sue begins ironing a mound of clothes piled in a tub (221–222). The narrative lingers in loving detail over this activity, the closest attention Wright pays anywhere in the volume to the intimate choreography of physical labor.[60] As the scene progresses, an explicitly maternal side of Sue emerges, first with Reva, whom the older woman hustles over to the stove to dry and warm her feet when she comes in from the rainy night (227), then with Johnny-Boy, whom she feeds and fusses over before sending him back out into the storm (231–236). Reva has come to alert the family that the sheriff has gotten wind of a party meeting scheduled for the next morning (227). This in turn means that Johnny-Boy, having just rounded up his comrades for the meeting, will have to brave the elements a second time to warn them of the danger. Sue's argument with Johnny-Boy about the racial identity of the "Judas" who has betrayed the cell—and whom she assumes to be white—underscores her only-partial conversion to a genuinely Marxist class consciousness. She still lacks the ideal color-blindness of her son, who "cant see white n . . . cant see black," only "rich men n . . . po men" (234).

It is above all domestic space and domestic activity, then, that are disrupted when the sheriff and his cronies bring the cold white mountain crashing into Sue's kitchen, in search of the no-longer-present Johnny-Boy. The raiding party, however, begins to sample Sue's cooking, commenting with unintended irony and undisguised racism on the culinary talents of "niggers" (237); and when Sue appears in the doorway to chastise them for breaking and entering, one of them turns a handful of hot greens into the volume's most bizarre and incongruous weapon, "slamm[ing] her squarely in the face." After intimidation fails to make Sue give up Johnny-Boy's whereabouts, the sheriff appeals to her maternal instincts, urging her to betray her son in the interest of preserving his life (240). He then alludes mockingly to Sue's role as laundress, telling her to "git a sheet t put over im in the mawnin, see? Git yuh a sheet, cause hes gonna be dead!" With understated cunning, the sheriff and his storm troopers are directing the energies of white unmaking specifically at Sue's domestic functions, as if to rechannel her cooking,

cleaning, and mothering into activities beneficial to white power. They are doing their best, in other words, to remold this proud black mother into an Aunt Jemima, a figure whose primary function—serving white domestic interests—is expected to override her loyalty to her own blood kin. A more recent creation of the U.S. racial imaginary than her antebellum predecessor, Uncle Tom, Aunt Jemima was no less potent as a stereotype, condensing and recharging the imagery of kerchief-wearing mammies that reached back to slave times, allowing whites to legitimate and sentimentalize the domestic caregiving they extorted from black women.[61] Whether knowingly or not, the raiders tap into this verbal and visual lexicon and the racist assumptions attached to it. The sheriff even calls Sue "Anty" (237), applying the same Jim Crow "courtesy" title used to demean the Jemima figure.

Once again, however, the problem is that the avatars of white violence attempt to refashion Sue as a living stereotype while beating and kicking her across her kitchen floor. John Lowe is correct to point out the episode's affinities with the killing of Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, another scene of unmaking that turns a kitchen "into a torture chamber" ("Wright" 73).[62] But as a lesson in "whut white men do t nigger women" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 239) that attempts to pick up where Percy Grimm's lesson in what white men do to black men left off, this exercise in the pedagogy of pain can only backfire, deconstructing the Jemima figure in the very effort to construct her.[63] True, the lesson seems successful at first: "numbed and choked" by the "deep pain" that courses over her entire body (241), Sue is intimidated by the "huge white face" that materializes before her, like one of the bodiless apparitions of young Richard's nightmare in "Ethics," when she regains consciousness after her beating (242).[64] Pain clouds her judgment, diminishes her sense of agency; when the "white blur" (241) before her turns out to be Booker, the comrade she suspects to be the sheriff's informant (234), she is horrified to hear herself reveal the entire membership of the party cell to him. Like the "confession" of a torture victim, the act leaves her with a feeling of "being undone" (246). She seems to have unraveled as a political subject at precisely the moment that the party's survival and integrity face the greatest threat; she seems to have become a black pawn in white hands.

Ironically, though, Sue is able to extricate herself from this situation, to salvage political agency and complete her transformation into a revolutionary consciousness, by laying claim to the Jemima stereotype, a cultural artifact already half-unmade by the whites, and by deconstructing it further, signifyin(g) on Jemima by introducing subversive elements into her meaning and function. Having learned from Booker that her son has been caught by the whites, and from Reva that Booker was indeed the "stool" she feared him to be, Sue acts decisively, wrapping a handgun in a bedsheet and setting off for the woods. Ostensibly, she is coming to claim the body of her son, as

if in docile conformity to the sheriff's earlier instructions. But in reality she sets out to intercept Booker and kill him before he can expose the other party members. As Booker has appropriated her voice to uncover the names of her comrades, now she will appropriate the sheriff's words to explain her presence on the scene as she neutralizes that threat. As the sheriff invoked maternal love to persuade Sue to betray the party, here she will invoke maternal grief to conceal her true, murderous intent. And as the white men turned her own cooking into a weapon against her—and as other whites historically turned the white sheet into a habiliment of racial terror—she will turn the symbol of her laundering duties for whites into a weapon directed against them. It is quite a performance, a masterful mixture of creativity and unmaking that Wright presents, like Silas's last stand in "Long Black Song," as a moment of ontogenesis: "Her whole being leaped with will; the long years of her life bent toward a moment of focus, a point. . . . She stood straight and smiled grimly; she had in her heart the whole meaning of her life; her entire personality was poised on the brink of a total act" (253). As she marches toward the woods, fording rain-swollen streams, braving the elements like Mann in "Down by the Riverside," her "surging will" beats back the looming specter of Booker's face, the white disembodiment that always seems to bring black disempowerment in its wake (254).

She arrives, however, for the volume's third explicit scene of torture, as the sheriff orders Johnny-Boy's kneecaps broken, then punctures his eardrums, to try to make him talk (257–260). In contrast to "Fire and Cloud," and even to "Big Boy Leaves Home," where Bobo's torture is experienced vicariously by the protagonist, Wright does not allow his reader access to the private world of Johnny-Boy's pain. The focus instead remains on Sue. The episode is a test of her revolutionary will, her ability to endure the systematic destruction of her flesh and blood and still save a bullet for Booker, rather than using the gun to end her son's misery or to lash out against his captors. And she passes the test, dispatching the informant with a shot to the head before he can divulge a single name (261).[65] With this act, the unmaking of an Aunt Jemima is complete, an unmaking achieved from the inside out, with the performance of a stereotype so subversive as to collapse the stereotype. As in Taylor's case, Sue's unmaking as a racist icon doubles as her making, her self-willed transformation, into a proletarian subject, which allows Wright to celebrate her death at the hands of the angry, thwarted whites as an apotheosis of sorts, a Marxist martyrdom that Sue can see as the product of her own agency rather than that of her enemies: "She yearned suddenly to talk. 'Yuh didnt git whut yuh wanted! N yuh ain gonna never git it! Yuh didnt kill me; Ah come here by mahself.'" "Focused and pointed she was, buried in the depths of her star, swallowed in its peace and strength; and not feeling her flesh growing cold" (263). This final flourish reserves for Sue a nonequiva-

lence of dying body and surging consciousness that is a far cry from the collapse into mere matter of earlier figures like Bobo and Mann.

Yet as Wright himself must have understood, Sue's exultations are ultimately premature. Her sacrifice and Johnny-Boy's take care of the immediate threat of exposure by Booker and ensure the safety of the comrades for another night. But the cell is still scheduled to gather the following morning, the sheriff still knows about the meeting, and he has apprehended Johnny-Boy before the latter can make his rounds to call it off. Moreover, because Sue has taken it entirely upon herself to make amends for her moment of weakness with Booker, there is no one available to take Johnny-Boy's place and warn the comrades of the trap they are about to walk into. Reva, asleep back at Sue's cabin, remains unaware of the dire need that she might otherwise have been in a position to fulfill. The strong implication, then, is that Sue's heroism has achieved, in practical terms, nothing, that her death only prefigures, rather than prevents, the destruction of the cell. We may marvel at her personal transformation, but its revolutionary impact seems severely compromised.

A related irony is that Sue has of course been correct in her assumption that the sheriff's spy would turn out to be white, despite her son's objections that her racial reasoning is anachronistic, insufficiently color-blind. Her intuitive form of black nationalism, then, the product of long years of experience that have taught her to distrust the motives of whites and to count on the solidarity of her fellow African Americans, proves more reliable in the end than Johnny-Boy's disciplined class consciousness, whose revolutionary disavowal of race is thus undercut as so much naïve idealism.[66] No doubt in part as a result of Wright's growing disaffection with communism as the 1930s gave way to a new decade and the party shifted its focus in the United States from fighting racism to the war against fascism, the expanded edition of *Uncle Tom's Children* concludes with a tale that appears to take a skeptical step back from the triumphant political action that ends "Fire and Cloud," even as it continues to explore the work of creative unmaking in the formation of black radical subjectivity.[67]

Read 'Em and Weep

Wright's recantation of *Uncle Tom's Children* in his 1940 essay, "How 'Bigger' Was Born" (an essay published even as Harper was preparing to reissue the offending volume), is well known. Early reviews of the collection, positive as well as negative, convinced Wright that his audience was misreading him. "I found that I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about" ("How" 531). Though the collection's most exemplary characters must learn to eschew sentiment in favor

of a tough-minded revolutionary stance, ready to make their white oppressors, in Silas's words, "*feel* it"—their presence, their resistance, their lives—Wright came to suspect that by making black pain his artistic focus and medium, singling it out as the defining element and product of Jim Crow race relations, he had invited just this sort of sentiment on the part of his readership: the mobilization of readerly sympathies toward an emotional, purely personal, and politically inert response to his characters' suffering, rather than an engaged one. Interior catharsis, in other words, rather than social change. Wright had already dramatized this inadequate, self-congratulatory response in the white nurse who witnesses Mann's grief and loss in "Down by the Riverside": "Poor nigger," she mutters (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 88), not even aware that her pity leaves her racism intact. "I swore to myself," Wright continues, sounding a bit like Silas, "that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears" ("How" 531).

What Wright is almost saying here, with his image of elite white female readers responding emotionally but inadequately to the physical and affective ordeal of his black southerners, is that despite his best intentions, and despite the confident proclamation in his volume's epigraph that "Uncle Tom is dead!," he may simply have written a latter-day version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Like the uncomprehending nurse, after all, the figure of the banker's daughter introduces much the same dynamic of readership at work in the sentimental fiction that Harriet Beecher Stowe and other antebellum writers produced at the nexus of their era's leading reform movements, feminism and abolition. Indeed, Stowe's abolitionist contemporary Wendell Phillips voiced doubts about the deeper loyalties and commitments of Stowe's lachrymose readership that were nearly identical to Wright's doubts about his own: "There is many a man who weeps over Uncle Tom and swears by the *Herald*," Phillips wrote, alluding to New York's leading proslavery newspaper during the antebellum period (qtd. in Lott, *Love* 218).

As Karen Sánchez-Eppler has shown in *Touching Liberty*, this was an occupational hazard among "feminist-abolitionist" writers such as Stowe, who pursued their emancipatory agenda by tapping into the linked but nonequivalent predicaments of women and slaves as corporeal beings whose bodily specificity worked to disqualify them from the abstract, disembodied forms of Castronovo's necro citizenship, which ruled antebellum political discourse and legitimated the interests of the elite white men who controlled it (Sánchez-Eppler 3–4). According to Sánchez-Eppler, feminist-abolitionist discourse attempted "to transform the body from a site of oppression into the grounds of resisting that oppression" (49) by recognizing in the "bodily bonds" that circumscribed the political identities and possibilities of black men and all women what I call recalcitrant materialities, offering the basis of

identifications, affiliations, and alliances that might lead to personal transformation and social change in the antebellum United States. Moreover, the bodily basis of the identifications that structured and drove feminist-abolitionist writing received additional emphasis from the sentimental conventions in which so many white antislavery writers, Stowe included, chose to frame their appeal. Sentimental fiction, as Sánchez-Eppler puts it, is "an intensely bodily genre" (26) in which reading itself becomes a physical act, in which the immediacy and "palpability" (27) of sighs, heartbeats, and especially tears work to "contract the distance" and "blur the distinction" (135) between suffering characters and sympathetic readers.[68] By thus "enroll[ing] the reader's bodily responses in the act of overcoming difference" (134), sentimental tales by white authors put the cultural work of literary representation in service of "the political project of claiming personhood for the racially different body of the slave" (135).

Not, however, without a host of attendant complications. As Sánchez-Eppler explains, the alliance between feminist and abolitionist energies in the fictions of antislavery writers such as Stowe was at best an uneasy one, "characterized by patterns of exploitation, appropriation, and displacement" that limited both the extent and the emancipatory effectiveness of identifications and affiliations across the bodily bounds of race (13). The fact, for instance, that white female readers and writers could find in the predicament of the antebellum slave an emotionally compelling way to illuminate their own (similar but asymmetrical) status as persons who could be "owned, absorbed, and unnamed" according to the patriarchal legal codes of the era raised the disturbing possibility that "the enlightening and empowering motions of identification" that fueled feminist-abolitionist discourse were ironically "bound to a process of absorption not unlike the one that they expose[d]" (20). Indeed, notes Sánchez-Eppler, "the difficulty of preventing moments of identification from becoming acts of appropriation constitutes the essential dilemma" of this discourse. It is also the central dilemma of Wright's anecdote, where identification with African Americans serves a white female agenda as the bankers' daughters appropriate black suffering in service of their own emotional release.

A related problem stems from the sentimental emphasis of so much feminist-abolitionist rhetoric. "The assurance in [sentimental] fiction that emotion can be attested and measured by physical response," writes Sánchez-Eppler, "is precisely what allows it to be shared" (27). Though this fiction deploys "bodily signs . . . adamantly and repeatedly . . . as the preferred and most potent mechanisms both for communicating meaning and for marking the fact of its transmission," there can be no guarantee that the *impact* of that meaning will exceed the strictly personal, will go beyond the interior of the reader's body to effect change in the public sphere. The danger, then, is

that words might succeed in acting on the body—an article of faith in sentimental writing—but without that body in turn acting on the world. This, of course, is exactly what happens in the case of Wright's dewy-eyed daughters of privilege. They're crying all the way to the bank.

This is no doubt why for his next work of fiction, *Native Son* (1940), Wright shifted his affective focus from pain to the explosive combination of anger and fear that propels Bigger Thomas down his antihero's path toward destruction. Even in the act of discovering himself through violence, an arc of creative unmaking that *Uncle Tom's Children* has prepared the reader to recognize, Bigger remains an unsympathetic character throughout *Native Son*, and Mary Dalton is the white philanthropist's daughter who illustrates the error of responding to him sentimentally, with easy tears and a vague and naïvely Marxist idealism. Moreover, Bigger's ontogenesis lacks the political inflection and collective context we observe in Taylor's, Sue's, and even Silas's acts of self-authorship and/in rebellion. It is a personal transformation only, one that multiplied thousands or even millions of times may suggest the potential for revolution—or anarchy—among the alienated black youth of Jim Crow America, but only implicitly, abstractly. Indeed, while it is possible to see Bigger's accidental killing of white Mary and his cold-blooded murder of black Bessie as desperate, indiscriminate responses to his oppression, these acts are a far cry from the explicitly and concretely political forms of resistance that Silas, Taylor, and Sue direct against their individual and institutional oppressors in *Uncle Tom's Children*. One reason Bigger is so frightening and alien as a character is that Wright keeps the reader more closed off from his protagonist's pain, and more immersed in his seething rage, than in the tales of *Uncle Tom's Children*. But another reason is that Bigger's suffering fails to attain the political coherence and expression that we encounter in the closing stories of the earlier volume; indeed, that suffering is just beginning to attain intellectual coherence for and to receive intellectual articulation from Bigger as the novel ends (see Reilly, "Giving" 59–60).

Sánchez-Eppler helps shed light on another legacy of antislavery fiction that represents a potential problem for *Uncle Tom's Children*. "The domestic and sentimental conventions of this fiction," she observes, "subscribe to a moral, emotional, and fundamentally spiritual code that devalues bodily constraints to focus on the soul" (46). The attempt by feminist-abolitionist writers to craft a fiction that would "inscri[be] . . . black and female bodies into the discourse of personhood" (13), in other words, was undercut by the ideology of their chosen literary form, which invited them to "retreat to the realm of the intangible" (46) by grounding personhood in spiritual qualities. The supreme example in antislavery writing of this "Christian and sentimental vision of noncorporeal freedom and personhood," according to Sánchez-Eppler, is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which celebrates "the victory of Tom's spiri-

tual power over Simon Legree's physical brutality" (47). This celebration, however, is achieved at the expense of Tom's body, which is sacrificed so that this paragon of otherworldly virtue can attain the "glorious emancipation from plantation slavery" that only death can offer (48). This is the double bind that results when antislavery discourse is sentimentalized: the "effort to liberate the body result[s] in its repression and annihilation" (49). The politics of antislavery could all too easily devolve into a necro politics.

Uncle Tom's Children verges on a similar glorification of black death and absence. With the sole exception of Taylor, every important character in the collection winds up either dead (Buck, Lester, Bobo, Mann, Silas, Johnny-Boy, Sue) or in flight from the prospect of death (Richard, Big Boy, Sarah), and the deaths of Silas and Sue in particular are presented as the final, crucial stage in their liberation and self-reconstruction as resisting subjects. Though Wright is at this point in his career too much the Marxist to offer any hint of otherworldly consolation or Christian afterlife for these fallen martyrs, there remains a clear element of apotheosis at work in their death scenes, as the flames from Silas's burning cabin (and, by extension, from his burning flesh) climb heavenward in "furious pillars of smoke" (Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* 156), or the narrative eye pans upward from Sue's corpse to the troubled skies above (263). Wright must have realized, then, that his fables of emergent black subjectivity flirt with the same contradiction that once haunted feminist-abolitionist writers: "The bodies [they] wish reclaimed, and the bodies they exploit, deny, or obliterate in the attempted rescue are the same" (Sánchez-Eppler 49).

How, then, to extend personhood to and through the bodies—and not just the souls—of black folk? One way around the problem is to avoid the question of the soul entirely, as Wright appears to do in *Native Son*. Bigger Thomas is quite pointedly a *self* under construction, but that emergent ontology has far less to do with a Christian or even religious concept of personhood than with a more immediately secular and existential one, as Bigger's awkward, fruitless exchanges with the black minister who visits his prison cell make abundantly clear (see *Native Son* 325–350). Another way to meet the challenge of "acknowledging the corporeality of personhood" (Sánchez-Eppler 49), however, might lie, ironically, in bodily pain. And this brings us back to Wright's achievement in *Uncle Tom's Children*.

Wright was born near the end of an era that, as Athena Vrettos reminds us in her study of nineteenth-century representations of illness, saw the rise of comparative pain studies bent on establishing sensitivity to pain as "an index . . . of human worth" (152). According to these studies, which reflected the racist, sexist, and imperialist assumptions of the elite Euro-American males responsible for Victorian medical and scientific discourse, insensitivity or imperviousness to pain could be linked to the "primitive" otherness

of criminals, colonial subject populations, and "the lower classes and races" (151; cf. Pernick 156) in a nexus of subaltern marginalities we have already encountered in period discussions of fingerprinting (see chapter 1). On the other hand, hypersensitivity to pain could be considered evidence of the weakness and inferiority of women.[69] In either case, maladjusted embodiment, an improper response to pain, worked to disqualify the human objects of Victorian oppression and othering from the claim to personhood and communal belonging.

Seen in this light, the black pain that suffuses *Uncle Tom's Children* looks considerably less like the sentimental gesture Wright would forswear in *Native Son* and "How 'Bigger' Was Born" than like a loud, angry rebuttal to the "somatic fictions" that denied African Americans access to the humanizing potential of pain.[70] Wright is emphatic that his characters are neither impervious nor indifferent to their pain. They carry on in spite of and through it. And where Bigger Thomas will approach personhood—or will believe that he does—via the violence he inflicts on others, the men and women of *Uncle Tom's Children* ultimately transform their own pain into personhood, into a more fully developed consciousness and sense of agency. In this way, pain becomes an active, even creative force in the construction of black subjects and in the struggle for black citizenship. It also serves, for Wright as artist and for his characters as inchoate political subjects, as a bodily bridge from the interior world of black affect—anger, terror, grief, despair—to an intersubjective world where new emotional and political affiliations become possible, not only between readers and characters but among the characters themselves.

Wright's reputation as one of the most powerful voices in African American literature and one of the most devastating critics of the Jim Crow regime seems, to say the least, secure. How then, in closing, might we assess his achievement as a theorist of trauma? Current debates within trauma theory, at least in humanities scholarship, tend to hinge upon questions of epistemology (What is it possible to know about another's pain, or to make others know about one's own pain? What and where are the limits of the power of sympathy upon which the discourse of sentimentality, and an entire literature and psychology of human suffering, was once founded?) and upon issues of representation (To what degree can the experience of trauma, of sudden, catastrophic loss or injury, be conveyed in language? What pressures does trauma exert on signification? Should the traumatic nightmare or flashback be understood as a literal enregistration of an originary event, or as a representation subject to the distortions of suggestion and fantasy? What are the ethics and politics involved in making representation perform the function of witness to personal or collective suffering?).[71] From a contemporary perspective, perhaps Wright's most important contribution as a trauma the-

orist lies in the way he resituates this conversation. Turning away from epistemology and representation—for the stories of *Uncle Tom's Children* seem quite confident in their ability to develop a lexical and narrative vocabulary of black pain and to offer authoritative witness to black suffering—Wright focuses on broader issues of psychology and even ontology, on the impact of trauma on consciousness and being. As such, his focus seems closer to Freud's in texts such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which are among the founding documents of modern trauma theory.

Yet Wright's psychology of trauma also presents an innovation on Freud, whose works Wright studied in the 1930s and 1940s. For Freud, the effect of trauma in virtually all of its forms—from the catastrophic violence of railway accidents and the horrors of industrialized warfare on the Western Front to a child's anxiety over the temporary absence of its mother—was to disrupt the flow of psychic energy and impede the forward movement of human development by triggering defense mechanisms and reaction formations that mired subjects in the past, returning them over and over, in various displaced forms, to the scene of suffering or loss (see Freud, *Beyond*). For Freud, then, the trauma victim was above all a person who had gotten stuck on and in an experience that was perversely, painfully repeated, and who was for this reason unable to find fulfillment or self-realization, unable to move forward or grow. This has become a familiar paradigm, from the classic fin-de-siècle neurotics and hysterics of Freud's writings to the post-traumatic stress sufferer of today, and it is arguably at work in the early stories of *Uncle Tom's Children*, where, for instance, the trauma of his friend's lynching hurls the adolescent Big Boy backward rather than forward in developmental time, toward the infantilized space of the kiln, where he lies curled and cramped like the fetus he once was rather than the man that the white regime is intent on keeping him from ever becoming. Or where Mann is prevented from maturing into the full resonance of his name not simply by the blind and indifferent forces of nature but by the fatalistic and deferential attitudes he still carries within him as vestigial legacies of Jim Crow. In both of these tales, then, racial trauma arrests personal development.

But something else entirely happens in the final three tales of Wright's collection. There, oddly but also thrillingly, black trauma catalyzes black development, stripping away the anachronistic structures of consciousness that have prevented earlier characters—the children of Uncle Tom in the pejorative sense—from achieving manhood or womanhood and taking control of their lives. The mature protagonists of *Uncle Tom's Children*—Silas, Sue, Taylor—don't get stuck on the scene of loss: a wife's perceived betrayal, a son's mutilation and murder, a beating at the hands of whites. They come unstuck instead, seizing the existential freedom and responsibility to direct their lives toward what Wright calls "a total act." And even when they lay

down their lives in the bargain, as Silas and Sue do, we are left with a sense not of existence fruitlessly squandered (Bobo, Mann) but of existence fully realized in the act of sacrifice—and, in Sue's case, of a life willfully invested in the betterment, the forward progress of others. For these characters, the point is not so much to work *through* their trauma, as Freud would have it ("Remembering"), but to work *with* it, to *use* it as the malleable material of which new realities and new stories might be made. Wright's challenge to Scarry, Freud, and other trauma theorists lies in his conviction that the pain of his black southerners can assist in the making as well as the unmaking of the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

Difficult Embodiment

Coming of Age in Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda Stories

If illness destroys the normal ties between individuals and the social order, it also serves to reveal the nature of those ties.
—Claudine Herzlich and Janine Pierret

I hate love, she thought, as if this were the answer, I hate loving and being loved, I hate it.
—Katherine Anne Porter

Katherine Anne Porter's "Miranda stories"—"The Old Order," "Old Mortality," and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider"—trace the coming of age of three generations of southern women in and against a turn-of-the-century plantation order in East Texas and, later, a modernizing mass society in World War I–era Denver. The stories find a central, unifying predicament in the struggle of their youngest initiate, Miranda Rhea, to draw on the history of her foremothers and the lessons of her own experience in order to arrive at a viable model of womanhood upon which to found a mature identity. Along the way, Miranda, like her kinswomen before her, must negotiate the demands of "the old order," Porter's term for the traditional plantation regime with its hierarchical social and racial arrangements and strict gender codes, must come to a fuller awareness of a woman's stake in this order and its toll on her. She must also come to grips with the ideological power of the romance plot, the story of love and marriage that, as Porter makes clear, plays a primary role in recruiting young white women into the old order and winning their acquiescence to the exalted but also severely constrained place they occupy in it. Porter makes no attempt to deny or evade the difficulty of her protagonist's struggle for self-understanding and self-realization. More than once, she depicts Miranda in conscious or unconscious retreat from the painful insights she manages to glean into the mutually reinforcing institutions of patriarchal society.

The Miranda stories find another and perhaps more curious unifying predicament in the struggles of their various heroines with illness, or what, in an attempt to be more precise, I will call difficult embodiment. In two of the three Miranda tales, the coming-of-age drama is specifically framed as an illness narrative. In "Old Mortality," Miranda's glamorous but enigmatic Aunt Amy is courted not only by the dashing Gabriel Breaux but by an even more ardent suitor, the tuberculosis bacillus, which seems to lead to her mysterious death shortly after her marriage. In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Miranda's love affair with a handsome young soldier and fellow Texan is shadowed by the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918, which ultimately claims both lovers among its victims. "The Old Order," too, has its signature disease, the puerperal fever that haunts women of childbearing years among Miranda's grandmother's generation, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. And that specific malady is also accompanied in the vignettes of "The Old Order" by a whole host of somatic events stemming from the sexual and reproductive life of women, including menarche and menstruation, childbirth, lactation, stillbirth, and abortion. For these reasons, I want to avoid simply characterizing the Miranda stories as a whole as "illness narratives"; clearly, we need a discourse other than that of disease or physical handicap to describe the deeply and sometimes even painfully embodied experiences that go hand in hand with female sexual and reproductive *health*. So I have opted to put my argument in a slightly more awkward but hopefully more respectful way: the Miranda stories present the coming of age of young southern women as a drama of difficult embodiment.

This representational strategy is significant for a number of reasons. One leading critic and theorist of body imagery, Sander Gilman, has argued that representations of illness work to mystify and compensate for the primary horror of actual illness (32), which Gilman defines as loss of control, "that flux experienced in our sensing the transience of our lives and bodies" (175). As I hope to demonstrate here, however, Porter uses representations of illness and other hyper-embodied experiences in exactly the opposite way, to *de*mystify and materialize reigning cultural fictions of gender and by doing so to lay bare their somatic consequences, much as Faulkner does in *Light in August* with the racialized fiction of "blood" (see chapter 3). More specifically, Porter develops illness stories and other dramas of difficult embodiment, including one explicit tale of cutting and bleeding that unmasks the cultural work of the southern belle figure, as counternarratives to the highly stylized tales of romantic love and plantation grandeur that loom so large in the female, especially the white female, coming-of-age plot in the Old and New Souths. In these counternarratives—Porter's irreverent versions of the Victorian-era "somatic fictions" (see Vrettos) that, as we saw late in the pre-

ceding chapter, helped underwrite the subordination of women—the body comes to "speak" precisely what conventional, decorporealized scripts of female identity, duty, and destiny seek to conceal about female experience in the South. Disease, sexuality, and reproductive experiences give the stories, and occasionally the characters themselves, new ways of thinking and talking about what "the old order" *is*, what the romance plot *is*, how these cultural scripts function, and the high price they exact of southerners. This textual strategy becomes central to Porter's project of unearthing what family and community lore buries, manifesting what it represses. Indeed, throughout the Miranda stories and especially in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Porter equips the ailing bodies of her female initiates with the ability to recall, and moreover to enact, what the conscious mind cannot, or will not, always remember. Numerous critics, including Robert H. Brinkmeyer Jr. and Mary Titus, have commented on Porter's aesthetic technique of "endless remembering," in which critical acts of memory endow identity, history, and art with their basic content (Brinkmeyer, "Endless Remembering" and *Katherine Anne Porter* 16–27; Titus 195–201). In the Miranda stories, that technique takes on an explicitly somatic dimension: it frequently falls to the female body to remember and perform what the intellect is in danger of forgetting—or never knowing at all.

Before turning to the texts in depth, I want to acknowledge the biographical resonance of the particular forms of difficult embodiment foregrounded in the Miranda fiction. Porter had firsthand experience with virtually every one of them. Late in 1915 she was diagnosed with tuberculosis and spent the better part of the next two years convalescing at institutions in Carlsbad and Dallas, Texas (Givner 112–117).[1] After moving to Denver to continue her recuperation and work at a newspaper job, she fell victim to Spanish influenza in 1918, hovering so near death that her family had already "made arrangements for disposal of the body" when an experimental shot of strychnine administered by interns produced a miraculous recovery (125–126). Porter's experiences with sexuality and fertility have been the stuff of legend and rumor, first among her acquaintances and later among Porter scholars, but one critic, drawing on new biographical evidence, claims definitively that Porter terminated a pregnancy in Mexico in 1921 and that the stillbirth she claimed to have suffered in New York in December 1924 was not a fabrication but a real event (Unrue, "Birthdays" 41).[2] The fact that the somatic subject matter of the Miranda stories is biographically motivated, however, does not begin to exhaust its significance. As we will see in the pages ahead, the diseases and other medical conditions featured in "The Old Order," "Old Mortality," and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" are also freighted with historical and social meanings that directly illuminate the plight of Porter's heroines as they struggle toward mature selfhood and self-knowledge.

The (Same) Old Order

First published in its complete form in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (1965), "The Old Order" is a sequence of seven brief stories focusing on formative figures and events from Miranda's childhood in East Texas. Six of the stories, "The Source," "The Journey" (originally titled "The Old Order" before Porter reclaimed the name for the entire sequence in 1965), "The Witness," "The Circus," "The Last Leaf," and "The Grave," were originally published in literary journals between 1935 and 1941; "The Fig Tree" did not appear in print until 1960, though its composition dates back to roughly the same period as that of the other stories. Throughout this cycle of stories, Porter uses examples of intense embodiment to challenge a conservative understanding of southern plantation culture as the visionary creation of ambitious, strong-willed, elite authority figures—as a society produced and "ordered," in many senses, from the top down.

Porter takes us to the heart of the problem in the very first sketch, which introduces Miranda's paternal grandmother, Sophia Jane Rhea, as "the source" of the old order, and indeed of virtually *all* order, in the eyes of Miranda and her older siblings, Maria and Paul. As she moves ritually back and forth between her country farm and her town house, ordering repairs, supervising the housecleaning, and in general setting things straight upon her arrival at each location, Sophia Jane presides over a regime that is deeply reassuring, if also occasionally oppressive, to her motherless grandchildren, for whom "she was the only reality . . . in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or refuge" (K. A. Porter 324). Significantly, this authority is presented in largely disembodied terms: as the source and catalyst of plantation order, the grandmother is above all an observing consciousness, an overseer in the most literal sense of the word, whose power is concentrated in her visionary gaze: "Without removing her long veiled widow's bonnet, she would walk straight through the house, *observing* instantly that everything was out of order; pass out into the yards and gardens, silently *glancing*, making instant plans for changes; down the narrow path past the barns, with a *glance* into and around them as she went, a *glance* of firm and purposeful censure; and on past the canebrake to the left, the hayfields to the right, until she arrived at the row of Negro huts that ran along the bois d'arc hedge" (322–323; emphases added). This visionary effect is intensified by a specific syntax that accompanies the grandmother's efforts to bring order to the southern homeplace, making the operation of her authority seem automatic, even magical:

> Home-made lye soap would be produced from the washhouse, and the frenzy would begin. Every mattress cover was emptied of its corn husks and boiled, . . .

> every hut was thickly whitewashed, bins and cupboards were scrubbed, every chair and bedstead was varnished, every filthy quilt was brought to light, boiled in a great iron washpot and stretched in the sun; and the uproar had all the special character of any annual occasion. . . . [T]hen Grandmother's attention was turned to the main house, which must be overhauled completely. The big secretaries were opened and shabby old sets of Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Dr. Johnson's dictionary, the volumes of Pope and Milton and Dante and Shakespeare were dusted off and closed up carefully again. Curtains came down in dingy heaps and went up again stiff and sweet-smelling; rugs were heaved forth in dusty confusion and returned flat and gay with flowers once more. (323–324)

What this iterative syntax, with its strategic use of the passive voice, works to obscure, of course, is an even more fundamental and decidedly less visionary "source" of the old order: the human labor that scrubs the woodwork, hauls down the curtains, beats the rugs, and so on. It is quite a sleight-of-hand trick, an outrageous mystification: this labor is going on right before our eyes, but since its agents never achieve a grammatical subject position, it can by implication be credited to the grandmother's supervision, as if her disembodied gaze is not only omniscient but omnipotent.[3] Ever so briefly, Porter's narrator acknowledges the existence of other sources of the plantation way of life: "the black, rich soft land and the human beings living on it," who are also largely black (322). But in the remaining stories of "The Old Order" Porter will carry this acknowledgment much further, rematerializing the half-spectral presences occluded by the syntax of elite white authority to anchor her analysis of the plantation order in bodies rather than visions, hard labor rather than imagination and will. The sketches that follow "The Source" return again and again to the toiling bodies of African Americans, children, and above all women, locating their productive and reproductive work at the material foundations of southern society.

"The Journey" pairs the grandmother with her generational cohort and former slave, Nannie, revisiting the women's long history together, a history that stretches from turn-of-the-century Texas back to antebellum Kentucky. Once again, matriarchal authority on the plantation is associated with a visionary, disciplinary gaze: as the women reminisce and sew, they choose a vantage point "which commanded a view of the east wing, the front and back porches, a good part of the front garden and a corner of the small fig grove," so that "a glance now and then would serve to keep them fairly well informed as to what was going on in the whole place" (K. A. Porter 326).[4] Their activity reveals a complex, even contradictory set of attitudes toward the family past. On the one hand, Nannie and the grandmother act as custodians of that past, hoarding old "scraps of the family finery" and piecing them together into "bed and couch covers, table spreads, dressing table scarfs," and other homemade creations. Though some critics have celebrated

this quilting work as the symbol and vehicle of a distinctively feminine epistemology and historical imagination, Porter also appears to link it to the repression of history, since each new piece is immediately "laid away in a chest, never again to see the light of day"—the first of many acts of burial that the reader will encounter in the "Old Order" tales. The few family treasures that *are* chosen for public display are outfitted with tassels, patchwork covers, slipcases, and other examples of feminine craftwork. As they sew, the two women rhapsodize over the past and bemoan the sorry state of the younger generations (327). Porter's ironic narrative voice, however, immediately counters the nostalgia of her characters. "Who knows why they loved their past?," the voice asks, and the remaining pages of the story make good on this challenge by materializing the women's shared history as the history of their bodies, a history not at all nostalgic but hard-fought and "bitter for them both" as well as for others in the family circle. In this way "The Journey" evokes as it excavates an enormous weight of lived experience that must be repressed, misremembered, or otherwise "embroidered" before the old order can be properly revered.

Though Sophia Jane and Nannie both sentimentalize the past, they go about remembering it in different ways. The former "had masses of dates in her mind, and no memories attached to them: her memories of events seemed detached and floating beyond time" (328). Nannie, by contrast, has a knack for names, circumstances, and concrete sensory details, fleshing out the abstract coordinates of the grandmother's memory (see, for instance, 336). Citing the work of Dorothy Smith, feminist theorist Emily Martin has described the dilemma of individuals, mainly women, who "work in 'the bodily mode' and in so doing both allow others—mostly men—the freedom to work in the 'abstracted conceptual mode' and conceal from them that what they do depends on the material details being taken care of by someone else (women)" (199).[5] Nannie's epistemology reflects the fact that as a domestic servant in slave times and free, she has labored virtually all her life in this bodily mode; even conceptual activities such as memory continue to center on the "material details" of her experience, details upon which Sophia Jane's more "abstracted" style of remembrance comes to depend. Perhaps inadvertently, young Sophia Jane acknowledges this basic dependence when she inscribes Nannie's name in the family Bible, "just below her own" (K. A. Porter 328). Her outrageous words, "Nannie Gay (black)" (329), demystify white genealogy and the plantation order it underwrites, materializing the foundations of both in slavery and racial oppression, in the "(black)" bodily labors and other material details that lurk "just below" the visionary ambitions of dynastic heirs, making those ambitions possible.

It is characteristic of her abstraction that the grandmother's memory barely seems to register the stunning fact of her own fertility. "Grandmother

would say, 'I am the mother of eleven children,' in a faintly amazed tone, as if she hardly expected to be believed, or could even quite believe it herself" (329). Nannie, of course, more in tune with the witness of her body, enjoys no such luxury: "Nannie never doubted or expected anyone else to doubt she had children" (329–330). She has, in fact, had thirteen, and it falls largely to her to dramatize in the bodily mode the costs of this prodigious exercise in reproductive labor. It is Nannie who initially suckles her own babies and Sophia Jane's, while her white mistress, in keeping with the ideology of bodiless white ladyhood in favor among the plantation elite, exempts herself from the labor of nursing (334). It is also Nannie who, after the birth of her fourth child, contracts puerperal fever, the postpartum infection of the lining of the uterus that became an emblematic disease in nineteenth-century literature, underscoring the physical risks attending maternity.[6] And it is Nannie who bears a disproportionate share of the emotional and spiritual trauma of child mortality, having lost ten of her thirteen children (329). All ten are "buried in Kentucky," a fact that exposes Sophia Jane's lost ancestral homeplace as a dark and bloody ground where slaves were concerned.

Sophia Jane's upbringing certainly encourages her to view her own reproductive life in a spirit of abstraction. Her adolescence is a masquerade of idealistic disembodiment: lost in a fog of "high-minded poetry" (335), "melancholy little song[s]" she picks out on the piano (336), and "incredibly exalted daydreams which threatened now and again to cast her over the edge of some mysterious forbidden frenzy" (335), she conceals the life and desires of her body from herself as well as others, misreading her own recurrent dream of defloration, for instance, as a moral allegory rather than a "physical experience" of erotic longing. "She lived her whole youth so," Porter writes, "without once giving herself away" (336) until, caught up in the romance of her own virginity and of "the sweet dark life of the knowledge of evil" that she associates with her cousin and suitor, Stephen (335), she is finally "married off" to him at seventeen (333). That the slave Nannie is "married off" at the same time and age only underscores the pragmatic motives behind each arrangement, but by this time the romance script has already done its ideological work, mystifying the reproductive role into which it has lured Sophia Jane.

Once married, however, there can be no denying this role, since both women immediately embark upon a "grim and terrible race of procreation," with "a child every sixteen months or so" (334). Unlike Nannie, Sophia Jane outlives "only" two of her eleven children, which brings the child mortality rate for the two women to an even 50 percent, a staggering reminder of the physical and psychological demands of peopling the plantation order. When Sophia Jane binds her breasts to suppress lactation, her effort at being bodiless takes a physical toll, leaving her "in dreadful discomfort" as her body stubbornly refuses to forget its maternal identity, "speaking" that suppressed

identity in a language of physical pain. Here the breasts themselves become the recalcitrant materialities that upbraid the young aspirant to necro southernness: there can be no going back to the ethereal white femininity of bellehood and the romance plot. Moreover, suppressing her milk ironically deprives Sophia Jane of the natural form of contraception that prolonged nursing can sometimes provide, a brief respite in the grim and terrible race (see McMillen 122; Brodie 45–49). But when Nannie's puerperal fever forces Sophia Jane into the nursing role, the latter is surprised to discover "a sensual warm pleasure" in the experience (K. A. Porter 334).[7] Falling back on old romantic habits, Sophia Jane idealizes her "natural physical relief," sublimating it "into something holy, God-sent," but we should not miss the fact that, for once, Porter's demystification of southern marriage has turned up a form of female embodiment that is deeply gratifying. Sophia Jane's unexpected pleasure in nursing helps to offset other pleasures that never quite materialize in the bedroom, where, apparently, the romance plot has written a check that poor Stephen can't cash.

The final chapter in "The Journey's" brief history of plantation bodies deals with labor of a more conventional but no less harrowing kind. Here plantation fiction yields briefly to a pioneer narrative, in which the family's "terrible second year in Texas" (338) exposes the precarious foundations of the plantation enterprise in the sheer physical toil that must be exacted from everyone, white or black, male or female, adult or child, if a working farm is to emerge from the wilderness and the settlers are to survive. The situation is so desperate that two of Sophia Jane's sons, aged nine and eleven, run away from the farm, impelled by a vague fantasy of eating sugarcane in Louisiana (338–339). As their mother attempts to understand their rebellion, the text again flirts with the syntax of mystification: "She had built a house large enough to shelter them all, of hand-sawed lumber dragged by ox-cart for forty miles, she had got the fields fenced in and the crops planted, she had, she believed, fed and clothed her children" (339). But this time not even Sophia Jane is convinced. The plight of her sons—worked and starved like slaves before becoming latter-day fugitives from the plantation—demands that these founding events be remembered differently. Significantly, this revisionary memory is launched by and grounded directly in the act of touch and the bodies of the boys: "she felt their growing bones through their thin flesh, and remembered how mercilessly she had driven them, as she had driven herself, as she had driven the Negroes and the horses, because there was no choice in the matter. They must labor beyond their strength or perish" (339). With this last sentence, Porter reworks Proverbs 29:18 into an indictment of the brutal logic behind the emergent plantation order: where there is no *labor*, the people perish. Vision is a luxury that can only follow in labor's wake.

Eventually, of course, the white children receive a return on this bodily investment, sharing in the wealth generated by the established plantation. But what about Nannie and the half-dozen other African Americans (338) who made the trip to Texas with the family? Do they receive any dividend on their embodiment? any compensation for it? The next sketch, "The Witness," strongly suggests that they do not. It is as though the account of Sophia Jane's death that closes "The Journey" (340) has simultaneously opened a narrative space for new voices, new perspectives on the old order, even new syntactical arrangements. The emergent voice of "The Witness" belongs to Uncle Jimbilly, a former slave who was part of the original expedition to Texas. Jimbilly confronts the young Miranda, Maria, and Paul with lurid stories of slave times, the horrors of the rice swamps, and the cruel tortures inflicted by the masters (341–342). In this way he attempts to witness for the "thousands and tens upon thousands" of his slave brethren who perished in spite of and indeed because of their labor, as part of the old order's human infrastructure (342). It is hard to know how far to credit Jimbilly's stories. He did not, after all, live in Texas or even in Louisiana until after slavery had ended, so his account of abuses in the rice swamps is almost certainly secondhand. The children find his lectures embarrassing (341), and throughout the sketch he is prone to an extravagance of statement and gesture that suggests that he may, like his former mistress, be embroidering his history even as he exhumes it for his young listeners.

A more eloquent witness to the physical torture of slavery can be found in Jimbilly's own body, which attests to a lifetime of labor-beyond-his-strength that has never been rewarded or eased. Here, in place of the "many thousands gone" motif that his stories have borrowed from the spirituals, Porter focuses on the silent testimony of a single survivor: "Uncle Jimbilly was so old and had spent so many years bowed over things, putting them together and taking them apart, making them over and making them do, he was bent almost double. His hands were closed and stiff from gripping objects tightly, while he worked at them, and they could not open altogether even if a child took the thick black fingers and tried to turn them back. He hobbled on a stick; his purplish skull showed through patches in his wool, which had turned greenish gray and looked as if the moths had got at it" (340). As a house servant, of course, Jimbilly has been largely spared the ordeal of the anonymous field hands in the rice swamps, yet he too has been slowly unmade by the labor of making he performs for others. Unlike "The Source," "The Witness" makes this labor present and visible in its syntax: "He mended harness and put half soles on the other Negroes' shoes; he built fences and chicken coops and barn doors; he stretched wires and put in new window panes and fixed sagging hinges and patched up roofs; he repaired carriage tops and cranky plows"

(340). Later in the story, Porter will draw on fairytale rhetoric to suggest how the white children's attitude toward Jimbilly mystifies and trivializes his history: "They knew, of course, that once upon a time Negroes had been slaves; but they had all been freed long ago and were now only servants" (341). Jimbilly's body, however, remembers and materializes the slave beneath the servant. No wonder he is associated with repression and its return, "carving miniature tombstones" for the burials of small animals (340), telling ghost stories (341), and recounting the subterranean traumas of the slave past.[8]

Nannie's body witnesses to the plantation labor regime in a similar fashion. In "The Last Leaf," the fifth sketch of "The Old Order," she has managed to outlive Sophia Jane, but the death of her fellow matriarch at first only means more work for Nannie, who must now take over all the domestic duties in the white household. As a result, her thin frame grows "hunched over more deeply," her "nobly modeled Negro face" is "worn to the bone," "and her spine seemed suddenly to have given way. They could hear her groaning at night on her knees beside her bed, asking God to let her rest" (348). As with the autumnal leaf of the title, gravity has become her enemy. Her story, however, is no mere echo of Jimbilly's, as the description of her bent body might appear to suggest. For one thing, she responds to being overworked more proactively than he does, asking her new employer, Sophia Jane's son Harry, for a cabin of her own and claiming numerous items of sentimental value from the big house (348–349), drawing on the ideology of possessive individualism to redefine her identity away from servitude. By contrast, Jimbilly's world remains densely crowded with the possessions of others. And where Jimbilly's body and voice witness explicitly to the legacy of slavery, Nannie fashions her body so as to materialize and memorialize a very different element of the African American past, trading in the black wool and calico of "the faithful old servant" and "freed slave" for the blue bandanna and corncob pipe of "an aged Bantu woman of independent means" (349) and articulating a subject position around this reclaimed African heritage.

Nannie also reclaims control over her labor, offering and withholding it on her own terms. Her departure from the big house severely strains the syntax of mystification, which, in the absence of any significant black "source" of order to mystify, can only become its own hollow parody and negation: "almost immediately after she went, everything slackened, lost tone, went off edge. *Work did not accomplish itself as it once had*" (350; emphasis added). Her occasional returns to the big house, where "[s]he work[s] . . . almost as she had before," only underscore her indispensability. "They would miss her more than ever when she went away" (350). What was once invisible, un(der)-compensated labor has become disconcertingly visible and valuable, now that Miranda's family can no longer count on it. By thus materializing and

underscoring her contributions to the white household, Nannie improves on Jimbilly's witness, turning her labors as well as her body into a form of testimony and critique.

She also issues a final pointed reminder that those labors extended into the reproductive sphere. In arguments with Miranda's father, Harry, she is fond of "slapping her slatty old chest with the flat of her long hand" and exclaiming, "I nuhsed you at dis bosom!" (351). This gesture is Nannie's trump card, creating room to maneuver in her dealings with her presumptive master who, flustered, always backs down. Though Nannie's words are "not literally true"—she did not in fact nurse Harry but "three of his elder brothers"—they voice a fundamental truth of the old order, the numerous ways in which slave women poured their own embodiment into their young white masters, not just as wet nurses but as caregivers, cooks, field hands, and willing and unwilling sexual partners. Nannie's "slatty old chest," her fallen, depleted maternal bosom—like Dilsey Gibson's much-diminished body in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*—invites us to recognize that lost embodiment as one of the constitutive ingredients of elite white manhood (see Faulkner, *Sound* 265–266).

That manhood resurfaces with quite a different look in "The Circus," the fourth sketch of "The Old Order" and the first to narrow its focus on Miranda's individual point of view. Through its circus setting, the story stages a grand yet compact materialization of the southern plantation regime, defamiliarizing and demystifying it as a crazy, cruel, dangerous, precarious, and thoroughly excessive realm of performance. This estranging image of the old order is played out for the old order itself as the audience, and at its heart is the figure of the white patriarch—precisely the figure, it should be noted, who is missing from Miranda's female-centered and -headed version of the plantation household. What is mindless entertainment for the rest of the family becomes for the more impressionable child an eye-opening education in the unstable foundations of a way of life and the illusory authority of its defining figure.

The circus episode obeys a hierarchical spatial scheme that maps social status onto vertical elevation: Miranda's family is seated high in the bleachers, beneath which a group of poor white boys look up at them with hungry, prying, unfriendly eyes (K. A. Porter 344). The family's privileged position, then, its high seating, carries with it an element of exposure and risk—a hint of things to come. But the family is itself looking upward at a still-higher figure far above the ring. Immersed in the gaudy sights, sounds, and smells around her, Miranda pauses to scrutinize this figure: "A creature in a blousy white overall with ruffles at the neck and ankles, with bone-white skull and chalk-white face, with tufted eyebrows far apart in the middle of his forehead, the lids in a black sharp angle, a long scarlet mouth stretching back into

sunken cheeks, turned up at the corners in a perpetual bitter grimace of pain, astonishment, not smiling, pranced along a wire stretched down the center of the ring, balancing a long thin pole with little wheels at either end" (344). If the exaggerated height and whiteness of the wire walker seem to offer a grotesque parody of the figure at the pinnacle of the southern social order—the white planter patriarch—so too does his performance: "He paused, slipped, the flapping white leg waved in space; he staggered, wobbled, slipped sidewise, plunged, and caught the wire with frantic knee, hanging there upside down, the other leg waving like a feeler above his head; slipped once more, caught by one frenzied heel, and swung back and forth like a scarf" (345). These antics delight the circus audience, but they prove too much for young Miranda. As long as she can believe that this strange being is magic, that "he was walking on air, or flying," she can enjoy the show (344). Once she sees the wire, however, the illusion of vulnerability is lost, and the man dangles over a very real abyss, where his whiteness and lofty eminence cannot protect him from the catastrophe lurking at every step—where, in fact, the danger he faces is a direct function of his elevated position.

Porter's implication, of course, is that this is an insight into both the precariousness of the planter figure and, by extension, the old order he represents. Part daredevil, part clown, he performs a cultural balancing act atop the southern social pyramid, where his authority, if not built entirely on air, remains unnervingly shaky, a wire's width from utter ruin. What is more, he performs in and presides over a venue that literally seethes with anger and violence, where lights flare and burn, music and laughter rage, and the crowd howls "like devils in delicious torment" (345), with something of the same resentment, perhaps, that is directed at Miranda and her kin by those poor white boys leering from below. The strong suggestion is that the masters of the old order were neither so secure in their grip on power and status nor so universally loved as they might have fancied. Small wonder, then, that this granddaughter of the elite class shrieks at the disillusioning spectacle "with real pain," collapsing into a "limp, suffering bundle" not unlike the human rag dangling from the wire above "like a scarf."

Ordered home by her father, Miranda is led away by Dicey, a family servant, only to encounter another unsettling specimen of circus manhood. At the entrance to the tent stands a dwarf, whose "little woolly beard" and "thin white wand" offer a distorted, defamiliarized image of masculine potency to complement the image of destabilized planter authority that Miranda has just left behind. Miranda would prefer to believe that this tiny creature is something inhuman, or a fellow child perhaps, eye to eye with herself, rather than an adult locked in a child-sized body. But his "look of haughty, remote displeasure, a true grown-up look," quickly disabuses her of that notion, "chill[ing] her with a new kind of fear" (345). Once again Porter links Mi-

randa's fear to the experience of seeing the white manhood of the old order unmasked and parodied, this time in its smallness. The wire walker and the dwarf present, in equally grotesque fashion, the two faces of that manhood: wobbly and stunted. In "The Journey," Sophia Jane saw southern white men in much the same terms, as reckless and immature (337). "The Circus" simply goes to greater lengths to prevent that dysfunctional gender identity from appearing normative in Miranda's eyes or the reader's.

The other family members also seem to see their way of life reflected in the circus spectacle, but in an altogether different manner. As they report back to Miranda on what she missed, they focus not on grotesque figures like dwarves and clowns but on "beautiful ladies with bright yellow hair, wearing white silk tights with red satin sashes" and hanging from trapezes "like flying birds"; "wonderful little ponies with plumes and bells on their bridles, ridden by darling little monkeys in velvet jackets and peaked hats"; and "[h]uge white horses . . . with men and women dancing on their backs!" (346). (And one man has, rather emblematically, put his head in a lion's mouth.) A page later this imagery is condensed to its essentials, "beautiful wild beings in white satin and spangles," "sweet little furry ponies," and "lovely pet monkeys" (347), evoking, respectively, the mythic figure of the southern belle, the cult of chivalry, and the ideology of black inferiority that, collectively, provided the white elite with a glamorous, reassuring, and comprehensible picture of the plantation world and their place in it. Miranda's elders, including the older children, are evidently so far inside this worldview, so acculturated to it, that the more incongruous or irreverent elements of the spectacle can neither threaten nor unnerve them. After all, they have their mystifications to fall back on, allowing them to see in the circus a sentimental allegory of the old order rather than its unmasking and critique. Not so Miranda, who that night dreams of "the bitter terrified face of the man in blowsy white falling to his death" and "the terrible grimace of the unsmiling dwarf," images that will not stay buried beneath the fantasies the family has fed her. The same imperfect acculturation that renders her emotionally vulnerable to the circus performance also makes her its most acute observer. We begin to see why the grandmother "had never approved of circuses," especially in the case of the very young (346).

"The Fig Tree," the penultimate sketch in the sequence, follows much the same trajectory as "The Circus." Once again young Miranda witnesses an unsettling event that seems to offer, in symbolically displaced form, a critical commentary on the foundations of the plantation order. Once again other family members step in to smooth over the troubling implications of this event, offering Miranda an alternative set of visual images to draw on in making sense of it. This time, however, the principal arena for this symbolic

drama is not a circus but a fig grove, and the principal figure under investigation is not the southern white patriarch but the southern child.

Moments before the family is to set out on a long journey to their country farm, Miranda wanders the orchard, where a hen and her chicks are scavenging figs that have dropped from the trees. Ordinarily one of Miranda's favorite pastimes is mothering small animals like these, "kittens and other little animals on the place, pigs, chickens, rabbits, anything at all so it was a baby and would let her pet and feed it" (360). This time, though, she spies a dead chick under one of the trees (355). Already preoccupied with death in a general, almost philosophical way—and no wonder, having lost her mother at birth—she knows what to do upon finding "any creature that didn't move or make a noise, or looked somehow different from the live ones": "she always buried it in a little grave with flowers on top and a smooth stone at the head" (354). So she hurries to complete the ritual before being called to the carriage to leave.

The fact that the dead chick is "naked and sunburned" (355) links its condition directly to that of another baby animal, Miranda herself. Earlier in the day, Nannie has packed "the Baby," as Miranda is sometimes called (357), into a stuffy starched bonnet to protect her from the sun (352), and more than once the child is reminded of the disfiguring effects of freckles and sunburn on the fair skin of little girls (352, 353, 357). The correspondences between the chick's vulnerable body and the child's, along with the macabre image of the animal's tiny grave—"just like people's," only in miniature (356)—allows Porter to evoke, through the chick's death, the larger and more disturbing specter of child mortality on the plantation. The narrator of "The Journey" has already raised this issue, of course, but "The Fig Tree" raises it specifically for Miranda, who learns, as Sophia Jane and Nannie did before her, that mothering the plantation's young all too often entails burying them as well—burying the *future* in addition to the past.

This lesson is brought home even more forcefully when the burial ceremony fails to provide the closure Miranda expects. Just as she puts the finishing touches on the chick's grave, "a strange sound came from somewhere, a very sad little crying sound. It said, Weep, weep, weep, three times like that slowly, and it seemed to come from the mound of dirt" (356). Miranda, of course, assumes that the voice she hears belongs to the buried chick. Badly shaken, she is called away before she can dig him out and set things right. On the way to the farm, "still listening for that tiny sound," she breaks down in tears, haunted by the spectral cries of the creature she believes she has put living into the grave. Suddenly, "The Fig Tree" has morphed into a Poe-esque fable of premature entombment and the return of the repressed. As Patricia Yaeger writes, place here becomes "crypt," a "landscape . . . of occluded sadness" and half-remembered trauma (*Dirt* 18). Miranda has done her best to

dispose of the damning evidence that the plantation is a deadly environment for the young. But the evidence won't stay buried, insisting, like some maddening gothic revenant, on being heard. Indeed, the chorus of "[w]eep, weep, weep" would appear to link the corpus delicti with another unfortunate child victimized by an exploitive economic system: Blake's chimney sweeper. As in "The Witness" and "The Last Leaf," Porter demystifies the workings of the old order by materializing the ghostly traces of the bodies poured into its bottomless maw. And as in "The Circus," Miranda's insight into these contradictions brings about an epistemological and moral crisis: "Things didn't make sounds if they were dead. . . . Oh, but she had heard it" (K. A. Porter 356).

It falls to Miranda's great-aunt Eliza to help her avert this crisis. Late in the story, when the mysterious weeping sounds resume, this time beneath the fig trees at the farm, Eliza identifies them for the distraught child as the flutings of tree frogs, presaging rain (361). It is an immensely comforting explanation, reassigning the melancholy chorus to the trees above Miranda rather than "the smothering earth" below her, to living creatures rather than a dead one, to a sense of place as miraculously animated rather than haunted by trauma—peeping, not weeping. Eliza has single-handedly transported Miranda from Poe territory to Shakespeare country, a Prospero's isle where the air is full of thrilling voices. Moreover, her description of the tiny frogs shedding their skins by "pull[ing] them off over their heads like little shirts" and eating them (361) doubtless strikes a chord in Miranda, who squirms against Nannie's attempts to button her into her outfit (352) and dresses her kittens in doll clothes to watch them tear their way out of the confining garments (357). As a symbolic gloss on southern childhood, the image is far more inviting than that of the "slimpsy," sunburned corpse of the chick (356), evoking youthful nonconformity rather than victimization. Eliza's words thus leave the grateful girl in a "fog of bliss" (362).

Part of what gives these words such weight is that they carry the authority of science. Unlike Miranda's other elders, who worship tradition and cannot always be trusted to call things by their right names (353, 354), Eliza draws on empirical experience to form her opinions and judgments, in a thoroughly modern manner. Porter critics have made much of this modernity, praising Eliza as a figure who counters the authoritarianism and traditionalism of her sister, Miranda's grandmother, by introducing the child to a brave new world in which adults don't have all the answers, women think for themselves, and "a million other worlds" exist alongside the old order (361), offering strange new possibilities to those imaginative enough to explore and seize them.[9] Eliza's sheer physical bulk (as opposed to the near-bodilessness of the "thin," "pale" grandmother; 359), her unladylike habit of dipping snuff, and her telescope, microscope, and magnifying glass (360) all signal her unconventionality, her openness to alternative ways of being and knowing.

Or do they? The specific instruments that symbolize Eliza's order of scientific knowledge should also serve to remind us how thoroughly that modern regime is grounded in practices of visual observation and inspection not so far removed from the panoptical surveillance and discipline practiced on her sister's plantation in "The Journey" and elsewhere. Michel Foucault, Martin Jay, and others have explored the visualist epistemology underlying modern intellectual culture and the links between its techniques of knowledge and effects of power. These techniques in turn link the sisters, for all their apparent differences, as visionary authorities over their respective orders. It should come as no surprise, then, to find the one's science acting as the ideological handmaiden to the other's plantation, toning down the latter's uncanniness and horror by explaining away a haunting as a rational event, silencing the subversive cry of the dead chick, and—"in her most scientific voice" (361)—offering in its place the amusing difference of those little frogs and their rebellious energies. A fog of bliss, indeed.

Porter pushes the connections between these visionary projects even further. Much as earlier sketches have identified the material origins of the plantation dream in the nursery, the kitchen, the fields, and the slave cabin, "The Fig Tree" locates the living infrastructure of Eliza's scientific enterprise in a similar site and source: when the family carriage pulls up to the farm, Eliza is already halfway up a stepladder, supervising Hinry as he sets up her telescope on top of the chicken house (358). Her makeshift observatory and the scientific authority it both demonstrates and enhances are erected upon the same foundation—the consumption of plantation bodies—as the old order itself, the very foundation, in fact, that Eliza's scientific observations work to occlude. Nor does Porter's wicked irony end here: when Miranda is invited to climb the ladder and share in the visionary delights of Eliza's telescope—the first stage in the scientific mystification of the plantation's excess trauma—she cannot do so without standing atop what is in effect a charnel house, a holding facility for consumable bodies that will be offered up to the old order as eggs and meat. Beneath her feet the peepings—or is it weepings?—of the chicks presumably continue (cf. Yaeger, *Dirt* 278). We may be back to a Poe story after all, specifically "The Fall of the House of Usher," whose rationalist narrator proves unable, even with the help of science, to explain away the uncanny horrors he witnesses and to keep the dead safely entombed. Perhaps the crowning horror of "The Fig Tree," though, is that the nightmares of the plantation aren't irrepressible enough to dissipate Miranda's fog—only, possibly, the reader's.

If "The Fig Tree" ends by documenting what amounts to the sealing of a grave, the largely successful rhetorical effort to hide the old order's toxic impact on the young, the final sketch, "The Grave," begins by reopening a gravesite and disturbing the repressive work of the romance plot. Again

animal bodies materialize the bitter realities of plantation life to counter plantation myth. Again children are present to witness the spectacle. But again their witness proves no match for the systematic amnesia of southern ideology, its seemingly limitless ability to turn bodies, minds, and memories into sites of burial and erasure.

Like the preceding sketch, "The Grave" is set on the farm, where Miranda and Paul roam the woods hunting rabbits and doves. It is typical of Porter's tightly controlled irony that the children will find precisely the quarry they are after, but first they pause to explore a family burial ground that has been recently emptied, the bodies exhumed for relocation to the new public cemetery in accordance with the grandmother's last wishes. (Thus her visionary designs continue from beyond the grave.) Digging through the open gravesites, each child finds a treasure. Miranda's is "a silver dove no larger than a hazel nut, with spread wings and a neat fan-shaped tail" and "a deep round hollow . . . cut in little whorls" in its breast, and Paul's is "a thin wide gold ring carved with intricate flowers and leaves" (363). They quickly arrange a trade, after which Paul reveals that his new prize is actually a large wing nut for a coffin screw.

Porter scholars have had a field day with this symbolism, but with the important exception of Patricia Yaeger, they invariably overlook the way both symbols specifically evoke, only to mystify, female reproductive embodiment.[10] The ring's "suggestion of fertility," for instance (Rooke and Wallis 63), is cloaked in the ethereal, highly stylized imagery of flowers, leaves, and circles, making of reproduction an abstract and exalted notion largely removed from the sphere of the body: necro fecundity. The dove, by contrast, is an explicitly embodied and gendered image, coded feminine by the cavity in its middle, which refashions the two-dimensional geometry of the ring into a more genuinely womb-like enclosure. Insofar as its round hollow also resembles a bullet wound (this is, after all, a hunting story), the dove links fertility with physical invasion, suffering, and risk, and its literal function as a coffin screw head reminds us of the close proximity of maternity and mortality in the Old South.[11] Even here, however, the traditional religious association between the dove and the Paraclete, along with the bird's long history as a symbol of peace, works to spiritualize the image, arguably mitigating its impact. It is perhaps understandable that the girl prefers to trade away this ambiguous token of womanhood for the full-fledged mystification offered by the more familiar ring. As in "The Fig Tree," then, the southern earth appears to speak its subterranean truths to southern children, exposing the roots of plantation society and the fruits of plantation romance in reproductive labor. But even though the autochthonous "utterance" here takes the form of solid objects rather than ghostly voices, its meaning is largely lost on

Miranda, who is still beguiled (or befogged?) by the "serene purity" of the ring (K. A. Porter 365).

The sight of that "fine gold" against Miranda's "rather grubby thumb" triggers an elaborate retreat into mythic southern femininity. "She wanted to go back to the farmhouse, take a good cold bath, dust herself with plenty of Maria's violet talcum powder . . . put on the thinnest, most becoming dress she owned, with a big sash, and sit in a wicker chair under the trees" (365). This screen fantasy of utterly passive, ornamental, disembodied white female beauty—necro bellehood—is explicitly identified as the ideological product of the plantation regime, "founded on family legend of past wealth and leisure."[12] It is where the old order and the romance plot intersect, the latter supplying a glamorous image of the southern belle as romantic heroine on display that allows the white girl-child to be recruited into the old order. It is, moreover, a scenario of conspicuous consumption—bathing, dusting, dressing up, sitting around, killing time—in which the only valued labor is the fashioning of the self as etherealized sexual commodity and the body work of reproduction is not even hinted at.

This is no doubt why the story immediately stages a second and much more graphic lesson in southern embodiment that shows where this recruitment effort finally leads, literally fleshing out the meaning of the silver dove's hollow body. The children flush a rabbit, which Paul kills with a shot from his rifle. As he brings out his bowie knife to skin his trophy, the children kneel on opposite sides of the carcass, and the scene takes on the formal quality of an initiation rite.

> Brother lifted the oddly bloated belly. "Look," he said, in a low amazed voice. "It was going to have young ones."
>
> Very carefully he slit the thin flesh from the center ribs to the flanks, and a scarlet bag appeared. He slit again and pulled the bag open, and there lay a bundle of tiny rabbits, each wrapped in a scarlet veil. The brother pulled these off and there they were, dark gray, their sleek wet down lying in minute even ripples, like a baby's head just washed, their unbelievably small delicate ears folded close, their little blind faces almost featureless. (366)

The passage is a direct rejoinder to Miranda's daydream of luxurious bellehood, laying bare its material roots and maternal agenda, as a southern female body becomes the site where a social regime confronts its ineluctable origins in the "natural," "disorderly," and "unaccountably rude" facts of muscle, flesh, bone—and fetal corpses sprinkled neither with cool water nor with talcum powder but with their mother's red blood: "'Ah, there's blood running over them,' she said and began to tremble without knowing why" (366). Tiny and weirdly beautiful as dolls, the fetal rabbits recapitulate the

function that Luce Irigaray has assigned to all dolls, allowing Miranda to explore the mystery of motherhood and her relationship to her own origins (see Irigaray, *Speculum* 77–78)—not to mention her relationship to the origins of the plantation order and its signifying economy.

It is also Irigaray who has most fully and provocatively addressed the significance of that red blood. For her, as we learned in chapter 3, uterine blood, whether menstrual or, as here in "The Grave," maternal, is the furthest thing from a stigma or handicap, a mark of weakness or woundedness. It is the indisputable, indispensable material source—the matrix—of any social order, including the patriarchal orders that come to fear and revile it but also to acknowledge its power and mystery, as evidenced by the taboos that surround menstruation and childbirth.[13] As such, as the somatic manifestation of "[m]other-matter-nature" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 77), it "go[es] on forever nourishing" the very systems of philosophical "speculation" that theorize and justify women's subordination.[14] Irigaray's analysis reveals red blood to be a key ideological pivot point at which the true power, vitality, and abundance of the female body—what Yaeger calls "the regenerative, blood-giving beauty of successful gestation" ("Poetics" 279) and posits as the basis of a specifically maternal sublime ("Language" 18–20)—is mystified as inferiority and illegitimacy, its difference recoded as lack.

By bringing uterine blood to the surface of the female body, then, Porter's scene of cutting invites critical reflection on the oppressive work carried out by cultural fictions of gender that use blood to relegate women to second-class status. As we have seen, Faulkner accomplishes something similar in *Light in August* by bringing blood to the surface of the raced body in multiple scenes of cutting that defigure and unsettle the pernicious racial fiction of "black blood." Porter's project is especially meaningful and necessary in light of Faulkner's inability or unwillingness to extend his blood critique into the domain of gender. Even as it directs fascinated attention to the bleeding body of Joe Christmas—including his bleeding genitals—and even as it stages repeated scenarios of menstruation and childbirth, *Light in August* conspicuously averts its narrative gaze from uterine blood. Not so Porter's scene of cutting in "The Grave," which layers visual perspectives to call added attention to the scene of maternal blood, as the narrator's spellbound gaze follows and duplicates the children's own. As we in turn follow those gazes, the story sequence comes full circle, enjoining us to revisit "The Source," the blood origins of the old order.

Don Graham argues that "The Grave" can be read as an abortion narrative, in which a pregnancy is violently terminated by a blade-wielding male figure whose invasive acts of penetration prove fatal for the mother as well as the fetuses (16). This interpretation has merit, illuminating the reproductive risks associated with womanhood in the old order, where women bore large

families and doubtless faced many unwanted pregnancies. So does Yaeger's account of the story as a tentative yet ultimately stymied effort to develop a "poetics of birth." Given Miranda's age, however, "The Grave" may be most legible as a menarche narrative, a story of first blood—of the onset or threshold of the biological capacity to enter Yaeger's undertheorized and discursively marginalized economy of reproductive labor. Janet Lee and Jennifer Sasser-Coen have studied menarche narratives in depth, basing their research on interviews with a diverse group of U.S. women across several generations. They describe menarche not only as "a physiological happening" but as a "gendered sexualized happening, a transition to womanhood as objectified other" (181) that occurs as blood and reproductivity are gathered into a preemptive, normative model of feminine identity that is variously internalized or resisted by adolescent girls. This is more or less what is happening to Miranda in "The Grave," though "the secret, formless intuitions" gathering "in her own mind and body" (K. A. Porter 366) are in part vicarious, mediated by the mother rabbit's bloody, beautiful, mysterious, troubling ordeal. Even this mediation, however, is typical of menarche narratives, which, according to Lee and Sasser-Coen, often "exude a sense of fragmentation between self and body," describing first blood as something happening *to* the subject, or "something that seems to appear from the outside" (95), rather than something she *does*.[15] "The Grave" simply carries this fragmentation a step further, projecting it onto a different female figure.

Lee and Sasser-Coen's impressive inventory of menarche motifs offers a comprehensive gloss on Porter's story: "contamination," "concealment," "shame and fear of discovery," "alienation and sexualization," "lack and transformation of power, ambivalences about changing bodies," and "changing relationships" with friends and family members (5), including, specifically, new and confusing feelings about mothers (115–124) and brothers (136).[16] Certainly "The Grave" dramatizes how "physical bodies start to become more problematic" for girls approaching puberty (102) and links the confusion and anxiety of that phase with a growing awareness of "the real loss of freedom and safety incurred upon entering the gendered world of adults" (33; cf. J. Delaney et al. 78). It evokes a sense of the "specific physical restrictions" menarche brings (J. Lee and Sasser-Coen 104) in Miranda's fantasy of bathing, dusting, and confining herself to a chair rather than romping through the woods with Paul. (Is it the whisper of the girl's own imminent blood that prompts this fantasy? The way the details of the scene make a virtue out of menstrual necessities suggests so.) And in the image of Miranda's overalls and work shirt, straw hat, sandals, and rifle (K. A. Porter 364), the story evokes, though briefly and inconclusively, the tomboy role as a strategy for resisting "menarche and its accompanying pubertal developments" through the denial of normative femininity, a theme also explored by Lee and Sasser-Coen (173).

If Lee and Sasser-Coen are correct to observe that "it is at menarche that girls start to produce themselves as women" (6), "The Grave" discouragingly suggests that the acts of forgetting and concealment are integral parts of this production process. Anne Petersen claims that Western inattention to puberty as a significant developmental stage leads to "pubertal amnesia," the "systematic forgetting of events at this time of life" (qtd. in Lee and Sasser-Coen 38). Lee and Sasser-Coen challenge this view, citing the clear and often quite vivid menarche memories of their informants. They do, however, concede that "disciplinary processes of concealment" attend menarche (82) and contribute to the engendering and subordination of those whom they strategically name "menstruating humans" (92). Porter goes even further, ending her menarche narrative with a chillingly redundant series of burial acts, all orchestrated by or centering on the male figure of Paul. Standing over "the bloody heap" Paul has made of the rabbit, the children quickly begin to disavow the "forbidden" knowledge it embodies (K. A. Porter 367). Paul first "burie[s] the young rabbits again in their mother's body," then conceals the flayed carcass within its skin, then hides the body in the bushes, then convinces his sister to shroud the entire event in silence and secrecy: "Don't you ever tell a living soul that you saw this." Soon, "the whole worrisome affair" is laid to rest, first in memory and later beneath it: "it sank quietly into her mind and was heaped over by accumulated thousands of impressions, for nearly twenty years," accessible only "vaguely" in the form of a screen memory that substitutes for the rabbit's bloody remains: "the time she and her brother had found treasure in the opened graves" (367). The womb, the skin, the earth, the mind, the memory: a dizzying proliferation of burial places.

Just once, these graves too are reopened, in an accidental, Proustian resurfacing of the buried past in all its recalcitrance and excess. On "a market street of a strange city in a strange country" that is almost certainly Mexico, a now twenty-something Miranda pauses before "a tray of dyed sugar sweets, in the shapes of all kinds of small creatures: birds, baby chicks, baby rabbits, lambs, baby pigs. They were in gay colors and smelled of vanilla, maybe" (367). There before her are the fetal rabbits of long ago, along with the weeping chick of "The Fig Tree," and the "mingled sweetness and corruption" of "wilting flowers" and raw meat send her back to the "pleasantly sweet, corrupt smell" of the earth of her grandfather's grave (363). No sooner has the repressed returned, however, than memory once again steps in to perform its suturing work: "the dreadful vision fade[s]," replaced by the bloodless image of "her brother . . . standing again in the blazing sunshine," "turning the silver dove over and over in his hands" (368). Again the critical potential of the original image is safely contained, and even the screen image seems carefully pruned of subversive content, the dove's uterine hollow and its direct associations with death having apparently vanished beneath memory or

at least beneath mention.[17] The scene's telltale omissions and evasions thus illustrate what Yaeger calls "the rhythmic turn of reproductive repression. Every time the mystery of birth hovers into view, it is briefly explored, goes in search of a story-line, and is then pushed away" ("Poetics" 279) in a dynamic of rediscovery and reburial that hints at the story's frustrated yearning "for an alternative narrative, a story about reproductive labor that neither derides nor devalues the scope of this labor." Because author and heroine alike lack "a secular theory of birth that would allow women to formulate a new relation to the difficulties and pleasures of natality," "The Grave" can make its contribution to a poetics of birth only indirectly and provisionally, less by developing a new discourse of gestation and parturition than by witnessing "the construction and deformation of a modern reproductive *un*conscious" (270; emphasis added).

It is significant that it should fall to a developing nation such as Mexico to expose and materialize the buried logic of the old order. The specific connections in "The Grave" between the Mexican marketplace and the Texas homeplace hint at a deeper and mutually illuminating relationship between the two realms. To see Mexico through Texas, for instance, is to see it as southern, as part of a Global South founded in the institution of the plantation, the colonialist oppression of people of color, and the patriarchal oppression of women and children. (In Porter's Mexican stories, such as "María Concepción," "Virgin Violetta," and "Hacienda," all of these forms of exploitation are out in the open.) To see Texas through the Mexican street scene, on the other hand, is to strip the old order of its mystifying relationship to the United States (with its exceptionalist necro ideology of universal equality and freedom) and see it in terms of consumable bodies, as a gigantic marketplace in flesh—flesh in all sorts of "gay colors"—and as a regime that eats its young. Like the circus, the foreign marketplace is the plantation defamiliarized and in microcosm. Its sweetness and corruption are quite literally the essence of the old order, that old odor of florid romanticism commingled with the residual bodily legacies of oppression—and nowhere more for Porter than in the case of southern white womanhood, at once the blossom and the meat of plantation society.

The Consumptive Aesthetic and the Tubercular Grotesque: "Old Mortality"

Another tale of the bodily absences and repressions that structure southern myth and the ghostly traces they manage to leave behind in consciousness and narrative, "Old Mortality," first published in 1937, demystifies the romance of the southern love story as "The Old Order" demystifies the romance of the Old South itself—and by much the same somatic means and

with the same uncertain results. Here, however, the disparate threads and intimations that ran through the sketches of "The Old Order" are gathered into a single coherent (if contested) story line, in which a young woman, Miranda's aunt Amy, runs head-on into the romance plot and the traditional society it helped to legitimate and sustain. Here also the marketplace in flesh glimpsed briefly at the end of "The Grave" reappears in more specific terms as a marriage market, scene of an Irigarayan traffic in women. And here the red blood that courses through "The Grave" as an image of the Irigarayan matrix of plantation relations assumes a more specifically human form.

But "Old Mortality" is also a story of illness, and not just any illness but tuberculosis, the most emblematic and "literary" of all illnesses during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century period covered by the tale, when it was the leading cause of mortality in the United States and Western Europe (B. Bates 1) and was responsible for the deaths of over a billion people worldwide (F. Ryan 3). "Old Mortality" is pervaded by the language, imagery, and stock characters of period tuberculosis discourse. That discourse, however, like the social history of the disease, went through at least two distinct phases in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the turn of the century, after the rise of germ theory and the discovery in 1882 of the bacillus that caused the disease, tuberculosis had come to mean something quite different than it had meant several decades before, when it was typically called consumption. What is fascinating about "Old Mortality" is the way Porter uses both social constructions of the disease to inform her story and its central character, Amy Rhea Breaux—or, more precisely, the way these competing constructions come to inform competing versions of Amy herself, giving different generations of characters different ways of thinking and talking about the meaning of their kinswoman's intensely experienced life and early death.

Medical historians and demographers are in agreement that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brought a significant rise in tuberculosis morbidity and mortality in societies undergoing rapid industrialization and urbanization. Not coincidentally, this same period saw the rise of Romanticism in Euro-American artistic and intellectual culture. Indeed, as René and Jean Dubos, authors of the most influential twentieth-century study of the disease, have noted, tuberculosis helped supply Romanticism not only with some of its defining images and themes—dead or doomed youth, the "sadness of autumn" (once associated with bountiful harvests, now with falling leaves), graveyards and "abandoned ruins," melancholy and transience, the valorization of country over city life—but with its pantheon of artist-martyrs: Keats, Shelley, Chopin, Paganini, the Brontës, Thoreau, all of whom suffered from the disease (44–45; and see 11–42). At the same time, Romanticism supplied tuberculosis with much of its glamour, heightening its aura of spirituality and its associations with genius, passion, and the transcen-

dence of the body through "beatific" or "redemptive" death (Sontag 16, 41). In truth a gruesome, disfiguring malady, pulmonary consumption was reinvented by nineteenth-century literary culture as painless, symptomless, and ennobling (Dubos and Dubos 48; Sontag 16). It even helped reinforce the discourse of necro citizenship, as Russ Castronovo notes in a discussion of Little Eva, the consumptive child-heroine of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (135–136). According to Castronovo, the novel attributes Eva's egalitarian innocence, her disregard for the racial hierarchies that structure her Deep South plantation world, not only to her youth but to the mantle of ethereal righteousness conferred on her by her disease. "A half-living corpse who takes several chapters to die, Eva models how the citizen as 'true democrat' falls short of embodiment" (136). When "unrealizable democracy depends on dematerialization and is secured by death," consumptive martyrs like Eva prove to be just what the doctor ordered.

Out of this same discursive conjuncture came a new standard of physical beauty and in particular feminine beauty: a consumptive aesthetic, stressing lassitude over vigor, a pallid complexion (preferably offset by dark hair, eyes, and mouth), bird-like shoulders, and thin, elongated limbs draped in sheer, gauzy fabrics (Dubos and Dubos 54–57). Sontag cites this emaciated, cadaverous ideal—"the tubercular look," she calls it—as the forerunner of "[t]wentieth-century women's fashions (with their cult of thinness)" (29). Rouge gave way to whitening powder (Dubos and Dubos 54). Women took to fainting and reclining wearily on couches (55). And when such frailty and debilitation proved unfeigned, the work of actual illness rather than artifice, so much the better. "[I]t was the fashion to suffer from the lungs," wrote Alexandre Dumas *fils*. "[E]verybody was consumptive, poets especially; it was good form to spit blood after each emotion that was at all sensational, and to die before reaching the age of thirty" (qtd. in Dubos and Dubos 58–59).

Dumas was writing of Paris in the 1820s; the family legends recounted in part 1 of "Old Mortality" tell of Texas in the mid-1880s, the years of Amy's courtship, marriage, and death. This Victorian world, however, along with the nostalgic tales about it that filter down to Miranda and her sister at the turn of the century, remains in the grip of an outworn Romanticism whose pathological influence Porter explores through a subtle but ubiquitous language of consumption. A quick review of some of the more suggestive items in this consumptive "code" underscores the way it enlists minor details and offhand remarks as well as prominent events and motifs from part 1 of "Old Mortality" in a double-voiced discourse of disease.

More than any other American writer, Edgar Allan Poe was responsible for turning the tubercular maiden into a romantic icon. Poe heroines such as Ligeia, Berenice, and Madeline Usher are among the paradigmatic literary examples of the consumptive aesthetic: slender, ethereal, and doomed,

carried off by mysterious wasting diseases. We have already seen Poe's influence at work in the nightmares of premature burial that haunt the sketches of "The Old Order," but "Old Mortality" lays direct claim to his legacy for family and region when Miranda's father bends a few lines from "For Annie" into a tribute to Amy's memory before informing his girls that Poe "'was our greatest poet,' and they knew that 'our' meant he was Southern" (K. A. Porter 178). That a Poe poem could offer an impromptu commentary on the life of a southern belle is already hinted at early in "Old Mortality," where we are told, in words that virtually reproduce Poe's description of the supreme poetic subject, that Amy "had been beautiful, much loved, unhappy, and she had died young" (173).

In this respect, Amy might have been modeled after Poe's own child bride, Virginia Clemm, who died of tuberculosis in 1847 at the age of twenty-four. Like Amy who, "[a]fter dancing all night three times in one week," is bedridden by a hemorrhage (191), Virginia "continued to attend social functions in the evenings while coughing up blood and being too exhausted for much of the day to get off her day-bed," and she was in fact at a dance on the evening of her final, fatal attack (Dormandy 71). Poe was morbidly fascinated by his wife's condition. Of a much earlier hemorrhage, he had written that as she "clutched her throat and a wave of crimson blood ran down her breast," the effect somehow "rendered her even more ethereal!" (qtd. in Dormandy 93–94). Several years later, he would describe the decline of another tubercular love interest, the poet Frances Osgood, in equally lurid terms (Dubos and Dubos 54–55; Dormandy 94).[18] Amy seems to exert a similar spell over Gabriel, who only grows more determined in pressing his marriage suit the sicker she gets, finally winning the hand of the invalid at her bedside (K. A. Porter 191).

One measure of the basic anachronism of Miranda's family is the stubborn preference of old-timers like her father for Sarah Bernhardt over the more newfangled Madame Modjeska when discussion turns to the theater (179). The mention of Bernhardt's name, however, also helps develop the consumptive context of "Old Mortality," for the role with which the French actress was most closely associated in her long career was that of Marguerite Gautier, the consumptive heroine of Dumas *fils*'s 1848 novel, *La dame aux camélias*, later adapted for the stage (and by Verdi for his opera *La Traviata*). Modeled on the life of Marie Duplessis, a young countrywoman who enjoyed a brief career as a fashionable courtesan amid the glitter and intrigue of Paris before succumbing to pulmonary consumption in the same year as Virginia Poe, the Gautier character, according to one scholar, "stands as perhaps the consummate expression of the nineteenth-century consumptive ideal," a fallen woman ultimately redeemed through the suffering brought on by her disease, whose "wasting effect on the body" only winds up "enhancing

[her] feminine beauty" (Barnes 52). In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Bernhardt brought this character to international audiences, with enormous success.[19] Placing Bernhardt in Miranda's family's pantheon of artists, then, may be Porter's indirect way of implicating the aesthetic values of the Rheas as, in effect, morbid.

Leaving aside for the moment the contested issue of Amy's sexual purity, she recalls Marguerite Gautier in her simultaneous participation in romance and disease plots, and "Old Mortality" even finds an equivalent for Marguerite's camellias in the flowers that Gabriel sends "packed in ice" from Kentucky or New Orleans, seemingly unaware that the long journey by train and stage leaves them bruised and wilted on arrival (K. A. Porter 181–182). The condition of these flowers directly anticipates Amy's own condition on returning from a journey of her own, when she accompanies her brother Harry to the Mexican border in the wake of a farcical affair of honor that erupts at a costume ball; the three-day ride leaves her so weak she must be "lifted from the saddle" (189).

Horseback riding and dancing are major elements in Amy's personal aura of glamour and accomplishment. Both activities were also important motifs in the discourse of consumption. As early as the seventeenth century, the English physician Thomas Sydenham prescribed daily rides as a therapeutic measure specifically for consumptives (Dormandy 6; Dubos and Dubos 146), and riding also became part of an "American tradition" emphasizing the therapeutic value of rigorous exercise for those suffering from what Westerners euphemized as "lung trouble" (Waksman 58). Dancing, on the other hand, was thought by many nineteenth-century experts to bring on the disease or worsen its symptoms. Waltzing was singled out in the early 1800s as especially pernicious; according to one commentator, "the extraordinary exposure of the person, when driving in party dresses to the ball in winter nights, is fearful, and the return home, after the whirl of the waltz, and when every fibre of the young frame is palpitating, is eminently hazardous" (qtd. in Caldwell 36). Other authorities made a case against the polka, one Austrian going so far as to propose the new name of *Polka morbus* for the disease, since the dance seemed to bring on so many relapses (Dormandy 43; see also Dubos and Dubos 197). The same recklessness on horseback and on the dance floor that places Amy first among equals on the East Texas marriage market also makes her an invalid.

If this suggests that the résumé of the southern belle is intrinsically pathological, Porter's complete description of that résumé removes all doubt:

> There were points of beauty by which one was judged severely. First, a beauty must be tall; whatever color the eyes, the hair must be dark, the darker the better; the skin must be pale and smooth. Lightness and swiftness of movement were

> important points. A beauty must be a good dancer, superb on horseback, with a serene manner, and amiable gaiety tempered with dignity at all hours. Beautiful teeth and hands, of course, and over and above all this, some mysterious crown of enchantment that attracted and held the heart. It was all very exciting and discouraging. (176)

This is point by point a consumptive aesthetic, all the way down to that ineffable crowning quality that the ancients called the *spes phthisica*, the peculiar radiance and effervescence of spirit that often accompanied the final stages of consumption, when the deterioration of the body was thought to "[make] the mind shine with a brighter light" (Dubos and Dubos 59). Linked with passion, genius, and intense inner beauty, the *spes phthisica* was also, of course, a badge of death. The consumptive subtext beneath Amy's physical and personal charms not only foreshadows her eventual decline, but also hints at the way feminine beauty is itself consumed by the paradoxical bodily demands of the old order, with their extremes of physical vigor and necrotic incorporeality.

Moreover, Amy's death, less than six weeks after her marriage, adheres to a popular formula of nineteenth-century consumption literature, in which "it was a commonplace . . . for a bride to die of consumption on or immediately after the wedding day, the bridal dress turned into a shroud or winding-sheet" (Rothman 24). Seemingly aware of the conventional and entirely artificial role she is playing in the romance plot—"if I am to be the heroine of this novel, why shouldn't I make the most of it?" (K. A. Porter 189)—Amy herself forces the comparison between wedlock and deadlock in defending her choice of gray velvet for her wedding outfit. "I shall wear mourning if I like," she tells her mother, "it is *my* funeral, you know" (182).[20] The specifically "dove-colored" material of her cloak establishes a direct link to the hollow-breasted memento mori of "The Grave," evoking the maternal career into which marriage should, by definition, plunge Amy. The gray velvet of her dress also recalls the "dark gray" bodies of the fetal rabbits (366), a reminder of where maternal careers too often lead in an age plagued by high infant mortality. And the "dark red breast of feathers" that adorns her hat conjures at once the wounded bodies of the dove and the mother rabbit from "The Grave" *and* Amy's tubercular condition, her weak lungs and hemorrhages, which in turn may retroactively add a new layer of meaning to the cavity in the breast of "The Grave's" dove.[21] In this way, Amy's bridal attire gathers the embodied milestones of marriage, maternity, morbidity, and mortality in a single ominous image.

The specific cause of Amy's death, an overdose of pain medication that may or may not have been accidental (192–193), is familiar to readers ac-

quainted with nineteenth-century consumption lore. Laudanum was widely used as a sedative among the tubercular; addiction and overdoses were not unusual. Elizabeth Siddal, for example, another striking young consumptive of the era, died of a laudanum overdose shortly after her marriage to Dante Gabriel Rossetti; again, whether the act was accidental or suicidal remains a mystery (Dubos and Dubos 56). A minor poet, Siddal was better known as an artist's model for Rossetti and other members of the pre-Raphaelite group. In a sense, then, her career as well as her death foreshadow Amy's, since Amy makes her first appearance in "Old Mortality" as the subject of a photographic portrait (K. A. Porter 173) and later models her outfit for the costume ball in deliberate imitation of another female art object, a china shepherdess on the parlor mantel (185). It is significant that both of these performances are transgressive. Amy has the portrait made in part to record her deliberate flaunting of southern gender norms by cutting and curling her long black hair, an act that "horrifie[s]" Gabriel, "as if she had willfully mutilated herself" (183); years later, the response of the younger generation to the portrait confirms that it still retains its power to disturb (173).[22] Likewise, the low neckline, short skirts, and rouged cheeks of the shepherdess costume outrage Amy's father, who pronounces the whole get-up "Bawdy!" (185). The obvious pun on "body" suggests that he is upbraiding his tubercular daughter, of all people, for being corporeal, like her rural, working-class counterpart on the mantel, rather than ethereal, like a proper southern maiden and marriage candidate (or a proper consumptive heroine).

Those rouge spots are particularly significant. When Amy's father orders her to remove them, it is not just her "bawdy" that he refuses to acknowledge but, on an even more fundamental level, her blood, the red blood that is at once a symptom of her affliction and an index (indeed an advertisement) of her reproductive potential. As we have seen in "The Grave," the red blood of women is everywhere demanded, and everywhere denied, by the plantation order. Amy's subversive project in "Old Mortality" is to materialize this demand while resisting or circumventing the denial, and it is neither an exaggeration nor a criticism to observe that the effort to perform her own consumption by the regime is itself all-consuming (though perhaps no more so than submitting to its demands would have been). On one level, Amy's hemorrhages are her body's unconscious way of remembering what the romance script willfully forgets, that the patriarchal institutions of love, marriage, family, and the southern romance plot are rooted in a matrix of red blood. But she makes the point on a more conscious and artful level as well, ducking into the dressing room at the ball to reapply her rouge even more liberally than before, so that "the spots on her cheeks were like pomegranates" (185). In both cases, Amy directs her repressed blood upward, into what Sontag has

called "the upper, spiritualized" regions of the body (17), and outward, into the idealized social sphere of romantic masquerade, actively problematizing both realms.

In part 2 of "Old Mortality," Porter stages another revelatory social spectacle to drive home the blood lessons of part 1 for Miranda's generation. Nearly two decades after Amy's death, Miranda and her sister attend a horse race in New Orleans in which their uncle Gabriel, now remarried, is running a long shot named Miss Lucy after Amy's favorite mare. The children instantly note the incongruity between Gabriel's physical appearance and his romantic reputation. His florid face and bloodshot eyes, drunken body language and crude tongue (K. A. Porter 197–198) seem not just to contradict but to parody the central motifs of his legend: his dashing good looks, his intoxication with Amy, and the high-minded "tombstone poetry" he writes in her memory (181). With "Amy's handsome romantic beau" now stripped of mythic glamour and crudely materialized—"Oh, what did grown-up people *mean* when they talked, anyway?" (197)—the necro belle figure awaits her turn, which arrives when, to everyone's surprise, Miss Lucy wins her race and Miranda, dizzy with the excitement of victory, goes to pay her respects to "the star of the day":

> Miss Lucy was bleeding at the nose, two thick red rivulets were stiffening her tender mouth and chin, the round velvet chin that Miranda thought the nicest kind of chin in the world. Her eyes were wild and her knees were trembling, and she snored when she drew her breath.
>
> Miranda stood staring. That was winning, too. Her heart clinched tight; that was winning, for Miss Lucy. (199)

Even more directly than Amy's, Miss Lucy's performance demystifies the bodily destiny that awaits young female "thoroughbreds" as they compete to enhance the honor and status of the elite white gentlemen who are the real winners in this game. For Miss Lucy, the fruits of victory—bleeding nostrils, trembling knees, rattling breath—are the symptoms of disease, the hemoptysis, physical exhaustion, and snoring rale of the consumptive. To make matters worse, winning this contest means not only bleeding but breeding, as Gabriel makes clear when he announces his plans for Miss Lucy after the race: "I'm going to breed her, Harry. Her heart's worth a million dollars, by itself, God bless her" (199). The same fate, of course, was presumably in store for the victorious Amy until her medication intervened. Gabriel's desperately mercenary comments reveal how completely his future and reputation continue to hinge on female reproductive potential: "If anything happens to her now I'll blow my brains out. She's my last hope. She saved my life" (199). The scene thus bears out Yaeger's account of the "striking inequi-

ties" surrounding female procreative labor, the way "men have appropriated both this labor and the children it has produced" ("Poetics" 281).

Like the Mexican scene in "The Grave," the race scene materializes a southern market in female flesh, making its brutal logic explicit. On the racetrack or on the ballroom floor, the script of white male honor continues to be written in the female blood that restocks the old order. And once again, as in "The Circus," Miranda is the first and only witness to intuit the subtext of this spectacle, "instantly and completely" rejecting Miss Lucy's victory and her own stake in it upon seeing the bodily damage it has wrought.[23] In "The Circus," we should recall, a vision of "beautiful ladies," "sweet little furry ponies," and "lovely pet monkeys" was offered to Miranda as a sop to distract her from the upsetting memory of the wire walker and the dwarf (K. A. Porter 346–347). Here, however, among the society types, racehorses, and African American jockeys, even that screen fantasy is laid bare, giving Miranda a glimpse of the bloodlust at its core.

"Old Mortality's" consumptive code also gives Porter a way to talk about one of the more problematic characteristics with which Amy challenges her hidebound Texas world: her individuality. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rise of tuberculosis, especially in its most common form, pulmonary consumption, to the front ranks of killer diseases helped inaugurate a major historical shift in the social construction and what we might call the subjectivity of illness, making the experience of disease a more fully individuated phenomenon than it had been during the medieval and early modern periods. In a brilliant study, French sociologists Claudine Herzlich and Janine Pierret have explored this transition in detail. "At different times," they write, "one specific disease was seen by everyone as the embodiment of illness itself, not only because of its frequent recurrence and the danger it represented, but also because in various ways it was the material sign of the conditions of life, of the concepts of human existence and the values of the time" (3). This "dominant pathology . . . decisively shape[d] the experience of illness and the condition of the sick" (237). During the Middle Ages, and for much of European history before that, what Herzlich and Pierret call an "Ancien Régime of Disease" arose around the pathology of the epidemic as "a collective and social phenomenon that, whatever form it took, was the very embodiment of evil," finding its definitive form in the plague (3). The epidemic paradigm was characterized above all by numbers, by the specter of mass death, which emphasized "the collective fate" of families, neighborhoods, cities, and even provinces instead of the suffering of individuals, since counting and burying the dead rather than ministering to specific persons was the order of the day (4). The rapid course and soaring mortality rate of epidemics like the plague also ensured that illness would be experienced and defined more as a "way of

death" than as a way of life. The plague victim would neither expect nor be expected by others to live long with the disease. Instead, he or she joined the hundreds or even thousands of other victims as living and then dying proof of the ephemerality of human existence and the threat of divine disfavor and punishment hovering over every sinning mortal (3).

Tuberculosis changed all that. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, it had taken over from the epidemics of the ancien régime as the paradigmatic embodiment of illness and had begun to give rise to a new regime of representation concerning disease and the afflicted (24). I want here to follow Herzlich and Pierret in calling attention to the role played by tuberculosis in overturning the older model of disease as "a mass phenomenon" (23). "For even though tuberculosis was a mass killer, it did not, unlike the great epidemics, submerge its victims in sudden and collective death. One died individually and rather slowly of tuberculosis, so that the victim was in a position"—as Porter's Amy is—"to perceive his condition, to form a self-image, and to discern the way in which others saw him" (30). Moreover, the "very duration" of the disease distinguished it in fundamental ways from the plagues of the past, making tuberculosis "a form of life before becoming a form of death." In this way, the phenomenon of illness, along with the experience of its newly individuated sufferers, acquired a narrative dimension, a continuity over the chronic course of the disease, whatever adjustments or concessions those sufferers might be forced to make to its degenerative effects. Both of these factors were at work behind the emergence of "the sick person" as the social face of illness, a figure defined "as an individual with his or her concrete experience, yet also, and by the same token, as a social phenomenon" (29) accompanied by "a specific status" and "a special place in society" (30). At the same time, the new existential phenomenon that Herzlich and Pierret call "being sick" took on an intensely solitary character, as opposed to the collective but anonymous brotherhood of epidemic death (49). In this way, tubercular individualism, which, as the specific epidemiological product of the living and working conditions of a nascent industrial era, rode in on the same capitalist tide as Romantic individualism, also contributed directly, through its paradigm of the sick person, to the formation of individualist ideology. The consumptive subject, the Romantic subject, capitalism's liberal subject, and the necro citizen thus went hand in hand in a powerful nineteenth-century discursive constellation.[24]

In the folklore of her family, of course, Amy's disease is an integral part of her individuality: its "mysterious crown of enchantment" (K. A. Porter 176) marks her as an exemplary beauty, while its aura of glamour and doom marks her as a worthy object of narrative attention, an exemplary tragic-Romantic heroine. But if her illness paradoxically enhances her value by making her different, it is equally true that her difference makes her ill, that the idiosyn-

cratic displays of will on horseback and on the ballroom floor that make Amy so irresistibly interesting to her suitors also wear her out, first bringing on and then bringing back the symptoms of her condition. More than that: the same spark of individuality and unpredictability that singles Amy out on the marriage market practically guarantees her maladjustment to the demands of marriage itself, when she will be expected to shed her delightful difference and conform to the age-old roles of wife and mother. Porter critic Jane Demouy has suggested that the analogical links between consumption and menstruation make Amy's illness into a symbol of "her womanhood," which Porter exposes with grim feminist insight as "a biological and social handicap to a free spirit" (193). But from the perspective of the plantation regime that awaits Amy after marriage, this free-spiritedness is precisely the problem, the handicap. It is what ails her and what all but ensures her unhappiness. Not only, then, does Amy's disease become her identity, her identity becomes her disease, her independence a pathology that dooms her. The nurse of her final days could not have put it better: "She could not get well, but she might have lived longer" (K. A. Porter 193).

Herzlich and Pierret have observed that modern representations of illness often construct the sick person as an innocent casualty of a "modern way of life itself" now understood as fundamentally unhealthy, a cause of disease in its own right, "corrupt[ing] and shap[ing] all the factors that can affect health" (109). On this model, human subjects are assumed to be naturally, intrinsically healthy until weakened beneath the onslaught of "a society that harms the individual in his or her very body" (238). When "a way of life begets illness," Herzlich and Pierret continue, "illness in turn . . . incarnates and objectivates within the body our negative relations with . . . our 'social environment'" (109) and as such "serves as . . . grounds for condemning what we call 'society'" (115). With its links between independence and pathology, Porter's account of consumption proceeds along these lines: when a young woman's imagination and wit and love of freedom become a disease from which she can never hope to "get well," an entire way of life is clearly being implicated. That way of life, however, has less to do with modernity's "urbanization and industrialization," as Herzlich and Pierret would have it (238), than with the old order's division of sexual and reproductive labor and its hierarchical differentiation of gender roles. As a consumptive, Amy becomes a living and dying indictment of plantation patriarchy.

At least that is so in the first two parts of "Old Mortality." In part 3, set in 1912, Porter's illness narrative shifts yet again, to a revisionary and sensationalistic indictment of Amy handed down by the unlikeliest of voices from the family past, a self-consciously modern voice drawing on a new, post-Victorian conception of tuberculosis that emerged around the turn of the century. At this time, according to Herzlich and Pierret, the impact of

germ theory and the 1882 discovery of the tuberculosis bacillus combined with rising anxieties about working-class life and conditions in European and American cities to recast the disease as a social and moral evil afflicting the underprivileged masses rather than an etherealizing inner fire afflicting the elite (26; and see Barnes 13). This change was accompanied by shifts in the vocabulary and imagery of the disease, as older labels like "phthisis" and "consumption" yielded to the clinical term "tuberculosis" in everyday usage as well as medical discourse, and Romanticism's emphasis on the ennobling impact and incorporeal, "decadent beauty" (Herzlich and Pierret 81) of the disease gave way to a grotesque, hypercorporeal mode of representation, a somatic fiction with literary links to the realism of the Goncourt brothers and the naturalism of Zola. The ubiquitous Francis Galton fell somewhere between these discursive poles in the 1880s, placing consumptives alongside criminals in the gallery of composite photographs he assembled for his *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (Sekula 45, 48), but also alluding wistfully to the "ideal wan face" that emerged from his composite studies of tubercular patients (qtd. in Doane, *Emergence* 128). The larger trend, however, was clear: once exalted as a passionate soul, the tubercular subject was at century's end increasingly "stigmatized" as a "germ-carrier" (Herzlich and Pierret 28), as "rotten, tainted, and damaged" (161): a vector of contagion, and as such an enemy of society (Barnes 83).

Even worse was the sense of culpability now assigned to tuberculosis victims, who were thought to be complicit in their own illness, for where consumption was thought to express personal intensity and genius, tuberculosis was now known to be caused by microbes that "developed in dank and airless slums" amid the "detestable habits of the lower classes" (Herzlich and Pierret 26–27), whose moral "degeneracy" (29), in the eyes of social workers and health professionals, brought on their "physical deterioration" (81). Increasingly linked to filth, intemperance, promiscuity, and general depravity, tuberculosis was joined with alcoholism and syphilis in turn-of-the-century discourses of hygiene and eugenics to form a "triptych of social scourges" hounding the urban poor (153). In France, for instance, the body of the prostitute and the social space of the cabaret became symbolically loaded sites where the three scourges and the grotesque stew of representations surrounding them converged, with dance, drink, extramarital sex, and disease all feeding each other in a vicious, downward spiral of subaltern corruption (Barnes 138).[25]

If Amy's cousin Eva Parrington—whom Miranda, now eighteen, encounters on a train at the outset of part 3, homeward bound for the funeral of Gabriel Breaux—is modern enough to become a crusader for women's suffrage, she is also modern enough to invoke a contemporary language of tuberculosis as she struggles to reinterpret and demystify Amy's life and death

for her young protégée. Eva, who ironically shares a name with the supreme consumption martyr in American literature, Stowe's Little Eva, uses the newfangled term "tuberculosis" to describe Amy's condition and pointedly refuses to find anything "romantic" or "beautiful" about it (K. A. Porter 215). She also, whether knowingly or not, borrows some of the central motifs of the tubercular grotesque. Without ever quite accusing Amy of outright promiscuity, for instance, Eva manages to shroud Amy and her fellow coquettes on the postbellum party circuit in a distinct aura of sexual obsession, intrigue, and scandal. "I never believed for one moment . . . that Amy was an impure woman," Eva tells Miranda, but she flouts family legend by describing Amy as "a bad, wild girl" (214). More troublingly, she insinuates that an ulterior motive was at work in Amy's "odd" decision to "r[i]se up suddenly from death's door to marry Gabriel Breaux, after refusing him and treating him like a dog for years" (212), and she repeatedly suggests that Amy's premature death was intentional, that "she did away with herself to escape some disgrace, some exposure that she faced" (214). Eva never specifies what this presumably sexual "disgrace" might have been, though she hints that the mysterious "Raymond from Calcasieu" (214), whose presence ignited the ridiculous affair of honor at the costume ball (186–189), was somehow involved. Was Amy unfaithful to Gabriel before—or after—marrying him? Could she have been pregnant, and if so, by which man (if either)? Was she already married? Did her disease and death allow her to mask sexual impropriety—or, more subversively, to perform the contradictions of her desire?

The possibilities grow even more intriguing with Eva's revelation that Amy used to drink lemon and salt to suppress her periods before dances (215). Eva cites "a superstition among young girls" of her era that any such hint of messy, mundane, physical existence as menstruation would cause their stock to drop in the eyes of suitors, who were thought to be able to tell "what ailed" their escorts "by touching their hands, or even by looking at them" (215). Clearly, she believes that Amy subscribed to that bit of misogynist folklore right alongside her peers. But one could just as easily argue that by interrupting ovulation Amy may have been trying to boycott the old order's reproductive sweepstakes entirely or, even more transgressively, that she wished to gain the kind of control over her fertility that would allow her to explore her sexuality without embarking on the grim and terrible race of procreation—whether inside marriage or outside it. Either way, the action proves self-defeating, since it apparently aggravates Amy's condition: in Eva's words, Amy "brought it [tuberculosis] on herself" by imbibing her bitter tonic.[26] She does, after all, hemorrhage after one of these dances, as if the repressed menstrual flow were simply returning in displaced form when "she coughed blood." Whether she subscribes to her culture's mythology surrounding red

blood or actively seeks to manipulate and circumvent it, Amy's fate attests to the damage wrought by such debilitating fictions.

Eva's frank discussion of menstruation and hemoptysis links disease and sexuality more directly than any of Miranda's other sources. Her version of Amy is a far cry from the ethereal consumptive of Romantic myth and family lore. Lumped together with other Texas belles as shallow, "sex-ridden" rivals who "festered inside" (216), she squanders energies that, from Eva's politicized perspective, might have been put to more active and progressive use in the struggle to better the condition of women:

> "Those parties and dances were their market, a girl couldn't afford to miss out, there were always rivals waiting to cut the ground from under her. . . . [Y]ou can't imagine what the rivalry was like. The way those girls treated each other—nothing was too mean, nothing too false—"
>
> Cousin Eva wrung her hands. "It was just sex," she said in despair; "their minds dwelt on nothing else. They didn't call it that, it was all smothered under pretty names, but that's all it was, sex."

Music, dancing, women on display, illicit sexuality, festering corruption, and the long shadow of disease—Eva has fashioned a cabaret world out of the drawing rooms and ballrooms where she was once ridiculed for her strong opinions and weak chin. Improvising at once on the elite focus of the consumptive aesthetic and the sordid visions of the tubercular grotesque, she creates a hybrid image of ruling-class degeneracy to unmask a society that fancies itself civilized as a hotbed of cutthroats and courtesans. And at the center of this world stands Amy, whom Eva cannot recognize as a fellow freedom fighter ("she was *too free*," the suffragette complains; 215), only as a contagious example of frivolity and weakness to be avoided by women focused on the higher-minded pursuit of citizenship.

Yet Porter also hints at Eva's limited reliability as a narrator, suggesting that the corruption she attributes to Amy may be a projection of her own toxic bitterness at being devalued because of her unattractive looks and her belief in women's rights. It is a telling moment when Miranda shakes off Eva's gothic rhetoric of "festering women" as simply the latest in the long line of exaggerations and falsifications offered up by her family: "Of course it was not like that. This is no more true than what I was told before, it's every bit as romantic" (216). Porter thereby implies that neither the romanticism of Harry, Gabriel, and Sophia Jane nor Eva's attempt at grotesque realism can ultimately provide Miranda, a child of the turning century, with an adequate truth, an adequate understanding of her provocative kinswoman that might offer insight into her own coming of age. As "Old Mortality" draws to a close, Miranda is disillusioned to discover how effortlessly her father and Eva, despite their political differences and their conflicting views

of Amy, can slip back into the old habits and familiar assumptions of their generation to find common ground there. She vows to free herself from "their version of life" (219) by grounding her beliefs and values and knowledge in her own experiences: "she wanted something new of her own . . . and she was not going to stay in any place, with anyone, that threatened to forbid her making her own discoveries" (220).

The trouble, though, is that Miranda has precious few independent experiences to draw on. She has, for instance, attempted to strike out on her own, rebelling against both her father's authority and the institutional authority of the Catholic Church by eloping from her convent school and marrying (212). Yet her gesture seems even to her to have little to do with defining a distinctive identity or shaping a meaningful future, and it ironically verges on a mere repetition of her aunt's impulsive, glamorous, yet ultimately unhappy elopement with Gabriel. Indeed, in light of Amy's precedent, it is significant that after just a year Miranda's marriage inspires in her only "an immense weariness as if it were an illness that she might one day hope to recover from" (213). Once again southern romance is directly linked to disease and exhaustion. Little wonder, then, that Porter's narrator undercuts Miranda's declaration of self-reliance at the close of "Old Mortality": "At least I can know the truth about what happens to me, she assured herself silently, making a promise to herself, in her hopefulness, her ignorance" (221). This classic example of Porter's authorial irony leaves the reader wondering where Miranda can turn for insight into the meaning of womanhood in a modern age. Interestingly, the answer—insofar as Porter ever provides one—lies outside the South, but not outside the realm of difficult embodiment.

The Anxiety of Influenza: "Pale Horse, Pale Rider"

The trail that takes Miranda from the Texas and Louisiana of her youth to the Colorado of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" was blazed in part by tuberculosis. Historian Sheila M. Rothman has traced the movement of consumptive "health seekers" into the American Southwest in the second half of the nineteenth century, when sufferers from the disease were often "among the first settlers to populate these regions" (5) as they sought relief from their symptoms in the dry air, cool altitudes, and vigorous outdoor activity thought to be characteristic of life out west. Indeed, writes Rothman, "[p]ioneers, explorers, and health seekers were practically interchangeable" in places like Denver, the principal setting of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," where, by the second decade of the twentieth century, fully 50 percent of the residents could report that they or a close relative "had emigrated in search of a cure for consumption" (132). Porter herself was one of these migrants: in 1918, still recovering from the tuberculosis that had been diagnosed in Dallas in the fall of 1915, she relocated

from Fort Worth to Denver, where, at the age of twenty-eight, she took a job with the *Rocky Mountain News* (Givner 123). Miranda, now twenty-four and no longer married, works at a similar job in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," but her creator appears not to have endowed her with the condition that originally sent Porter westward. Still, tuberculosis continues to leave its mark on Porter's tale, which is named not only for the "old spiritual" Miranda sings with her new lover, Adam (K. A. Porter 303–304), but also for the specific figure of Pestilence in the biblical vision of the Four Horsemen of the apocalypse (Revelation 6:7–8).[27] One of Miranda's coworkers, for instance, the sportswriter Chuck Rouncivale, suffers from "bad lungs" that have kept him out of the military and left him insecure about his manhood as World War I drags on through the autumn of 1918 (K. A. Porter 286–287).

The pestilence at the heart of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," however, is not tuberculosis but influenza. The story's setting in the final month before the Armistice coincides with one of the peak periods in the pandemic of so-called Spanish influenza that, in less than a single year, killed over 675,000 people in the United States and over 20 million people worldwide—twice as many, according to historian Alfred W. Crosby, as in the entire 1914–1918 war (11). Crosby, the leading historian of the pandemic, calls "Pale Horse" "the most accurate depiction of American society in the fall of 1918 in literature" (318), one that powerfully evokes the social and emotional wreckage of the pandemic: the ubiquitous funerals; the disease's obscene, anomalous habit of preying on the young and strong; the rumors of biological warfare, of microbes released into the air from German submarines off the coast of Boston, where the U.S. epidemic started; and everywhere the fear of contagion and the corrosive effects of that fear on human fellow feeling. But Porter's tale is more than just a document of its time. It is also Miranda's coming-of-age story, an initiation into love, war, womanhood, illness, and death that she experiences directly rather than simply hearing about from others. As we will see, the symptomatology and epidemiology of influenza, along with the social history of the 1918 pandemic, give Porter a way to link Miranda's experiences to those of her foremothers while remaining alert to the peculiar modernity of the younger woman's predicament.

There are a number of suggestive parallels, for instance, between Miranda's illness and Amy's. Like pulmonary consumption, of course, influenza is a respiratory disease, and the 1918 flu was unusual in that its victims did cough up and spit blood and were prone to "sudden nosebleeds" (Crosby 7), not unlike late-stage consumptives. Indeed, the Spanish flu was occasionally misdiagnosed as tuberculosis, an understandable error given these symptoms and the presence, revealed by autopsies, of "thin, bloody fluid" in the lungs of the dead (8–9) and the systemic, "fulminating" course of the disease at its most virulent, which resembled the most feared form of tuberculosis, "gal-

loping" or miliary consumption (Davies 103). This flu was also unusual for its high incidence and high mortality among young adults, the age group traditionally associated with the consumptive aesthetic. Ordinarily a killer of small children and the elderly, influenza in 1918–1919 created a surprising spike in the mortality rate for twenty-five- to thirty-four-year-olds, giving the age distribution graph for the pandemic a distinct "W-curve" rather than the expected U shape (Crosby 86).[28] In its perverse preference for young men and women, then, the disease mimicked not only the Great War, as Crosby notes (21), but the popular image of romantic consumption.

The parallels continue. Though Miranda complains of headache and fever from the outset of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," she falls seriously ill only after a long night of theatergoing and dancing with Adam that resembles Amy's all-night dancing sessions and subsequent collapse (K. A. Porter 295–298). As in "Old Mortality," there are bedside declarations of love as the heroine's illness worsens (304), and Miranda's landlady makes allegations against the poor girl that conflate sickness, moral corruption, and sexual impropriety in much the same way that Eva did in drawing on the rhetoric and imagery of the tubercular scourge to malign Amy (299). Both stories link illness and horseback riding: Amy's three-day journey to Mexico and back ends in an attack of consumption, while Miranda rides Graylie, the horse of her childhood, to escape Death in the fever-induced dream that opens "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" (270). Finally, there is the way Miranda's illness cuts short her doomed relationship with Adam, much as Amy's does with Gabriel—though with one crucial difference that I will address in detail below.

Other aspects of Miranda's illness help define her experience and consciousness as distinctly modern in contrast to her Victorian foremothers, beginning with the etiology of the pandemic itself. Influenza, of course, had been around for centuries, but the massive scope and speed of the 1918 outbreak stemmed from specific conditions of modern life and, even more to the point, of modern warfare. Crosby, for example, cites the unprecedented size of the troop movements and civilian migrations between Europe and the Americas during World War I (31), along with the unprecedented concentration, not only in the trenches of Europe but in military camps and bases on both sides of the Atlantic, of hundreds of thousands of able-bodied men from the very age groups most susceptible to the disease. These social factors combined with influenza's rapid incubation period (around three days) and its high degree of infectiousness as an airborne disease to ignite the pandemic and elevate it to epic scale. As the grotesque spawn of modernity itself, the Spanish flu in turn introduced its victims to a sensibility we can recognize as incipiently modernist.

Porter dramatizes this process by recording the impact on Miranda's consciousness of the burning fever and body aches brought on by influenza.

Trapped in her body, alone in the terrible privacy of illness and pain, she becomes the isolated, fragmented self of literary modernism, a dissociated sensibility observing its own suffering: "Her mind, split in two, acknowledged and denied what she saw in the one instant, for across an abyss of complaining darkness her reasoning coherent self watched the strange frenzy of the other coldly, reluctant to admit the truth of its visions, its tenacious remorses and despairs" (309–310). Her delirium produces the distorted, subjective temporality that fascinated so many twentieth-century artists and philosophers: "Time seemed to proceed with more than usual eccentricity, leaving twilight gaps in her mind for thirty minutes which seemed like a second, and then hard flashes of light that shone clearly on her watch proving that three minutes is an intolerable stretch of waiting, as if she were hanging by her thumbs" (292). Her fevered dreams are the elliptical, surreal, hallucinatory expressions of a modernist subject *en procès*: weary, belated, uncertain, haunted by death, loss, and oblivion (see, for instance, 269–270, 299).[29] As dispatches from Miranda's unconscious, they do double duty as an authorial language experiment, the most self-consciously modernist prose, in stylistic terms, that Porter ever wrote: lush in its rhetoric, disjointed and defamiliarizing in its narrative syntax, bold and synesthetic in its imagery. Moreover, their rich evocations of an interior life and their grounding in the rhythms and drives of the soma are a deliberate counterpoint, and corrective, to the linguistic inauthenticity and poverty of Miranda's war-torn world, where words either degenerate into mean-spirited patriotic prattle or flatten out into the clean, clipped, bloodless Hemingway-esque dialogue that Miranda and Adam speak when alone together.

We hear the first type of offense against language at the theater, where a Liberty Bond salesman harangues Miranda, Adam, and the rest of the audience with a numbing litany of clichés: "These vile Huns—glorious Belleau Wood—our keyword is Sacrifice—Martyred Belgium—give till it hurts—our noble boys Over There—Big Berthas—the death of civilization—the Boche"; "atrocities, innocent babes hoisted on Boche bayonets—your child and my child—if our children are spared these things, then let us say with all reverence that these dead have not died in vain—the war, the *war*, the WAR to end WAR, war for Democracy, for humanity, a safe world forever and ever" (293).[30] The language of Miranda's reveries attempts to convey the experience of disease, but here it is as if the salesman's language is itself diseased: flaccid, enervating, corrupted and corrupting, a contagious threat to citizen and nation alike. Overreacting to the obscene sentimentality and sensationalism of this discourse, Miranda and Adam commit an equal offense against language, carefully pruning their exchanges of any hint of deep feeling in their pursuit of "the right tone" (282):

"Do you know what the average life expectation of a sapping party is after it hits the job?"

"Something speedy, I suppose."

"Just nine minutes," said Adam. "I read that in your own newspaper not a week ago."

"Make it ten and I'll come along," said Miranda.

"Not another second," said Adam, "exactly nine minutes, take it or leave it."

"Stop bragging," said Miranda. "Who figured that out?"

"A noncombatant," said Adam, "a fellow with rickets."

This seemed very comic, they laughed and leaned towards each other and Miranda heard herself being a little shrill. She wiped the tears from her eyes. "My, it's a funny war," she said; "isn't it? I laugh every time I think about it." (283)

In a world gone over to war, pestilence, and senseless, ubiquitous death, this tough talk is understandable as an effort to compose the self against the violence of heartbreak and loss—to maintain the obligatory grace under pressure—but Porter clearly senses the toll such an effort takes on the inner life, on emotional honesty and intimacy. In this context, the affective intensity and sheer wildness of Miranda's dreams may represent a critique of the guarded, noncommittal, dare one say masculine accents she adopts with Adam, providing author and character alike with an alternative to the Hemingway mode of modernism: a body-saturated language of intimacy and risk, like the *écriture féminine* of Hélène Cixous or the *parler-femme* of Irigaray avant la lettre.[31]

When we turn from the interiority of Miranda's illness to her experiences in the social role of sick person, another side of influenza's modernity emerges. The Spanish flu plunges Miranda into a world of collective emergency and mass anonymity, where her specific predicament threatens to disappear beneath the sheer onslaught of the disease, which fills ambulances and hearses and turns hospitals into factory-like institutions where an overworked staff of professionals practices assembly-line medicine and all available beds are taken. It may appear from the magnitude of the pandemic that we are back in Herzlich and Pierret's ancien régime of disease: Miranda herself likens the outbreak to "a plague," "something out of the Middle Ages" (281), a sentiment later echoed by her landlady (299). But the Spanish flu ultimately has less to do with the early modern world of the epidemic than with a thoroughly modern regime that subjects the ill to rationalized processes of treatment and care on an industrial model. This is ultimately the same model that herded young men like Adam into the trenches of Belgium and France to serve as interchangeable fodder for the artillery and machine guns—industrialized killing power—and arguably the model at work behind the Liberty Bond campaigns as well, with their fear tactics and bandwagon

appeals, reducing human individuals to the purely functional role of donors and badgering "every firm in th[e] city" to "come in one hundred percent" (274). Where Amy's consumption singled her out, made her special and enchanting, influenza reduces Miranda to a nearly faceless cog in a vast sociomedical machine. Porter explicitly underscores this facelessness: when Miranda is finally admitted to the hospital, she winds up sharing a room with a corpse "swathed smoothly from head to foot in white, with folded bands across the face, and a large stiff bow like merry rabbit ears dangl[ing] at the crown of his head" (308). In this way the disease recapitulates the great modernist themes of depersonalization and anonymity.

It also gives Porter a vivid if indirect way to talk about the war. From the start, the Spanish flu was inexorably associated with the Great War. This was more than just a matter of timing: soldiers were among the principal victims, and principal vectors, of the disease, which made its first appearance in the Western Hemisphere late in August 1918 at Commonwealth Pier in Boston, a major embarkation point for American troops bound for Europe (Crosby 39). "Time and again," Crosby writes, "the first news of local influenza in a city's newspapers referred to army camps and army personnel" (62); in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Adam tells Miranda that "men are dying like flies" at the nearby base where he is stationed (K. A. Porter 281). War-related parades and rallies also contributed to the outbreak; Crosby reports that on the same day the first civilian case of Spanish flu entered a Boston hospital, "4,000 men, including 1,000 sailors from Commonwealth Pier and 2,000 civilian navy and shipyard workers, marched down the main streets of Boston in a 'Win-the-War-for-Freedom' parade. It didn't win the war, but it certainly spread flu" (40). One result was considerable home-front ambivalence toward the army itself: "The belief that the nation's protectors were now the source of its greatest immediate danger was common enough for some civilians to regard the military with fear" (56). As I hope to show, this ambivalence carries over in subtle ways into the relationship between Miranda and Adam, her fellow Texan and twenty-four-year-old.

And soldier. Porter carefully orchestrates Miranda's struggle with influenza as the home-front noncombatant's equivalent of the war experience, her initiation into the physical ordeal, sensory overload, and mass death that await young men like Adam on the modern battlefield. "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" begins with the onset of Miranda's symptoms, on a day that also places her among the sick and wounded soldiers of a local hospital ward (K. A. Porter 276), at the receiving end of a Liberty Bond sales pitch, and, of course, in the company of the handsome young soldier she loves. The story's climax, in which Miranda prevails over death through her sheer will to live and an experimental injection administered by her nurse, pointedly coincides with Armistice Day, as the sounds of celebration outside her hospi-

tal window ironically mimic the sounds of war (312). And the story ends like many a soldier's tale, with an impending reentry into the quotidian world, a homecoming that will at best be incomplete, a charade, since for the trauma survivor that "soldier's home" can never be the same. The silver-topped cane she requests from her friends (316) confirms it: Miranda is a veteran now, weary and disillusioned, physically and emotionally ravaged, battle scarred, old before her time: a liminal figure with "one foot in either world" and "the dead cold light of tomorrow" stretching out empty and endless before her (317).[32]

Ironically, this disillusionment may be a final symptom of her illness. Many survivors of the 1918 flu experienced acute depression in the weeks or months following the disease, a fact Crosby explains by citing recent medical evidence that severe viral infections can trigger "toxicity in the brain" leading to "insomnia, fatigue, anxiety, poor memory, paranoia, slowness of thought and speech, inability to understand rapid speech, and an inability to make decisions" even after the virus has abated (194). Not surprisingly, Crosby sees the final pages of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" as a deliberate evocation of this malaise (319). Paul Fussell has suggested that British high modernism was in large part the creation of the Great War, that the experiences of the battlefield and home front helped give writers of the era their distinctive subject matter, technique, and temperament. Together with Crosby's research, Porter's tale suggests that the 1918 pandemic may also have played an underappreciated role in the making of modernist affect.

Miranda is a veteran in one final, devastating respect: she has killed a soldier. While recuperating from her own brush with death, she receives word that Adam has succumbed to influenza at the camp hospital (K. A. Porter 315–316). He has contracted the disease, the text strongly implies, while holed up with Miranda at her apartment, nursing the delirious girl until the long-awaited medical help finally arrives (297–305). With this revelation, the soldier figure's dual role in the pandemic is unexpectedly split down the middle and mapped onto separate characters. Having fought off but also spread the disease, Miranda becomes the soldier-as-vector. Her lover and double, Adam, becomes the soldier-as-victim.

And as enemy? The suggestion might seem surprising. Most readings of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" cast Miranda and Adam as partners in a star-crossed romance that global war and illness conspire to destroy, with youthful idealism proving no match for the disillusioning forces of modern existence. (Think *A Farewell to Arms* but with Frederic Henry dying before Catherine can get pregnant.) These accounts of love literally plagued by illness, however, overlook the many analogies Porter develops between Miranda's illness and her love affair with Adam. As Thomas Walsh has observed, Miranda's "love and her disease develop simultaneously" in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider"

("Dreams Self" 87), following parallel trajectories through its plot. Like influenza, romance "incubates" over the early pages of the story, as Miranda and Adam grow closer. It "fulminates" in Miranda's apartment, where mutual declarations of love (K. A. Porter 304) are accompanied, and perhaps undercut, by Miranda's feverish ravings and hallucinations. And it subsides, of course, when death parts the two lovers, an event that ironically coincides with Miranda's recovery from illness. The course of love in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is inseparable from the course of disease.

Pursuing these connections further reveals how closely the symptoms of Miranda's illness mimic the symptoms of romance itself. By *symptoms*, I refer not only to specific physical signs of bodily infirmity but also to the broader consequences that follow in the wake of disease. In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," these consequences are economic, social, political, and psychological as well as somatic. Illness, for example, pulls Miranda out of the workplace and drives her back into the domestic space of her apartment, threatening her ability to support herself financially. It isolates and all but silences her, hurling her into her body and relegating her experience to a private, nearly incommunicable language. It weakens her, reducing her to passive dependence on a heroic male, which in turn jeopardizes her independent standing with her scandalized landlady. It consumes her in burning fever and delirium at the very height of her love affair, much as Amy's fever burned highest in the aftermath of the costume ball, touched off, no doubt, by the heated rivalry of Gabriel and Raymond (187).

Subordination, exhaustion, economic and emotional dependence, passivity, silence, the retreat from public to private sphere—this is the same fate that awaits the heroine of southern romance when her story inevitably arrives at marriage and motherhood. Once again, as in "Old Mortality," disease performs the central ironies and contradictions of the romance plot; in this sense, Melanie Benson is right to observe that "Miranda's new independence" out west remains "fraught with . . . reminders of the past she left behind" in Texas (126). Her illness, like Amy's, materializes and demystifies an old southern love story—but also, unlike Amy's, ultimately saves her from the fate of the romantic heroine. For while Miranda's illness, like her aunt's, proves fatal—yet another "symptom" of romance laid bare—it does not prove fatal for her. Quite the opposite: by removing her love interest from the narrative, it allows her to circumvent the romance plot even as she circumvents death—or, to follow Porter's feminist logic, to cheat death *by* cheating romance—whereas Amy escapes neither.[33]

Miranda's escape seems more a matter of luck, or authorial fiat, than her own doing, since she intends neither Adam's death nor the release from romance that it entails. Unconsciously, though, she may recognize that love's violence threatens the self-possession of one or both partners; one of her

dreams seems to express tremendous hostility to Adam, turning the traditional image of Cupid's dart into a mode of sadistic attack on the lover, a kill-or-be-killed scenario of guilt and resentment:

> [S]he saw Adam transfixed by a flight of . . . singing arrows that struck him in the heart and passed shrilly cutting their path through the leaves. . . . She threw herself before him, angrily and selfishly she interposed between him and the track of the arrow, crying, No, no, like a child cheated in a game, It's my turn now, why must you always be the one to die? and the arrows struck her cleanly through the heart and through his body and he lay dead, and she still lived. (K. A. Porter 304–305)

Even here, however, the dream's secondary revision remystifies and domesticates its disturbing account of love's insatiable demand for martyrdom. On waking, all Miranda can remember is "something about an old-fashioned valentine. There were two hearts carved on a tree, pierced by the same arrow" (305). The screen image may remind the reader of the similar displacement and effacement at work in the closing scene of "The Grave," where Paul's silver dove stands in for the more graphic and instructive spectacle of female coming of age provided by the carcass of the mother rabbit. It thus falls to the text itself to remember for Miranda, to fulfill the logic of her dream, with its implicit wish for Adam's death as the necessary price of Miranda's survival as an independent female subject. The story's most subversive spin on influenza is thus to turn Miranda's contagiousness into a form of feminine agency that clears a space for her to reclaim control of her own life from the clutches of the romance plot and its principal recruiting agent. The disease thus ironically functions as the power source that, according to Irigaray, red blood should but cannot be. If, as Suzanne Jones has noted, the ideology of romance typically "makes a man the agent of a woman's destiny" ("Reading" 177), the illness narrative of "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" flirts with this state of affairs but ultimately inverts it.[34]

The text strongly suggests that the whispered intimacies between Miranda and Adam at her apartment, where he "presse[s] his smooth face" against her feverish one to hear her words of love (K. A. Porter 304), mark the precise moment when she infects him with the disease. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray has noted the perversely paradoxical character of the phrase "I love you," in which the word "love" drives a wedge between lovers by forcing them into the separate grammatical positions of subject and direct object (206). To say "I love you" is thus to risk barring the very intimacy and sense of fusion that the utterance is meant to achieve and express. "You? I? That's still saying too much. Dividing too sharply between us" (218).[35] Porter offers an even more intense and self-defeating version of this dilemma. Since, for Miranda, to speak is to breathe, and to breathe is to spread deadly con-

tagion—*parler-femme* indeed!—the effect of saying "I love you" to Adam when he is so "very near" (K. A. Porter 304) is not simply to drive the lovers apart but to drive Adam and the dangerous temptations he represents out of Miranda's world entirely. The life she saves in this scene is thus her own.

The equivalences between war and illness and between love and illness in "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" point to a final equivalence, the timeworn one between love and war. It is in this context that the Armistice, which coincides roughly with Adam's death, can be seen to announce the end of love as well as the end of illness and war, and that Adam can be seen as the enemy soldier whom Miranda must vanquish—in a love scene, no less—to survive and remain whole. This subtext of antagonism may indeed be evidence of a fear of intimacy and commitment on Miranda's—and Porter's—part, as some have maintained, though I would hesitate to follow those critics who would characterize this fear as pathological. Rather, Miranda's family history of women consumed in marriage and childbirth suggests some sound reasons for her ambivalent attitude toward love. Nowhere in Porter's life or fiction, for that matter, do we find a marriage that is mutually fulfilling or empowering for both partners. It is always a zero-sum game, someone consuming, someone consumed, someone winning, someone losing, someone bleeding. And there is little to suggest that Miranda and Adam's romance would have ended any differently, for all his prelapsarian innocence and charm—he's not merely an American Adam, after all, but a young man from Texas, like Amy's tradition-minded Gabriel. Almost from the beginning, his chivalric values strike a slightly threatening note: walking with Miranda, he "accommodat[es] his long pace to hers, keeping her on the inside of the walk in the good American style, helping her across street corners as if she were a cripple" (295). ("I hope we don't come to a mud puddle," she thinks, "he'll carry me over it.") The scene is prophetic: by the end of the apartment interlude with Adam, Miranda *is* a cripple, who must be carried downstairs to the waiting ambulance.

As "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" comes to an end, it is difficult to know how fully Miranda has absorbed these insights into the romance plot's crushing effects on female self-reliance. Having avoided her aunt's fate of being "a ghost in a frame" (173), she nonetheless, in the story's penultimate paragraph, remains haunted by Adam's ghost and the promise of love it continues to hold out from beyond the grave. This promise Miranda knows to be "false," "the unpardonable lie of her bitter desire" (317), but she seems all too willing to suspend her disbelief and cast her lot with Adam, in a classic case of survivor guilt. Have the lessons of difficult embodiment been wasted? Again—but with what intent?—she says "I love you," and again the self-defeating words come to her rescue, pushing the specter away. "The room was silent, empty, the shade was gone from it, struck away by the sudden vio-

lence of her rising and speaking aloud." The moment may be just enough to jolt her out of her reverie—a final feverish dream?—and reclaim her for the world of the living: "She came to herself as if out of sleep. Oh, no, that is not the way, I must never do that, she warned herself" (317). Even here, however, she may simply be cautioning herself against speaking the truth of her desire out loud. Better, perhaps, to play the expected role of grateful survivor, to appease the living rather than confess a deeper allegiance with the dead. "[S]oon," she thinks, "I shall cross back and be at home again." But the ambivalence remains.

After describing how the sick person's role can "turn from an interruption" of ordinary social existence "to a kind of strike against one's social role" (183), Herzlich and Pierret go on to sketch a more visionary approach that "would turn illness into a revolutionary force, the site where the contradictions within society become visible" (186). In this "militant" scheme, the sick body would become "the basis of a new political action" (229), a mode of resistance and critique. It is tempting to cast Amy and Miranda in this subversive role. For while difficult embodiment primarily happens *to* the black and white women who come of age in the sketches of "The Old Order," it could be argued that the young heroines of "Old Mortality" and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" exercise control over bodily meaning, making a kind of performance art out of their own illness, or at least recognizing its potential to demystify the false promises and fleshly premises of the southern love story. The question remains, though, how fully either woman assumes conscious authorship of the cautionary tale she enacts, how far either ultimately sees into the signifying potential of her disease. Safer, perhaps, to say in the end that it's Porter who makes their condition signify, that her representations of illness approach the kind of revolutionary impact Herzlich and Pierret describe. Exposing the logic of a social order that makes a romance out of difficult embodiment, Porter's illness stories are feminist fables in which love can only end "unhealthily ever after" for southern women.

CHAPTER SIX

Reading War on the Body

The Example of Bobbie Ann Mason's In Country

We do not need their testimony. Our own scars and stumps of limbs are witness enough for others and for ourselves.
—John Kerry

If you can't believe the veteran who fought the war and was wounded in the war, who can you believe?
—Ron Kovic

War can be war without feeling like war.
—Miriam Cooke

I don't think you have to live through a trauma to understand it.
—Maya Lin

When the subject is war, who has the knowledge, the authority—the *right*—to speak? Few questions can carry more civic, political, and moral urgency in an age such as ours, when war has come to threaten not just individual human lives but all human life and perhaps all life on Earth as well. We all have an enormous stake in who gets to talk about war or, more precisely, in who gets to be heard talking about it, pronouncing judgment on it, telling stories about it, defining it, *declaring* it—and declaring it ended. Over the centuries, soldiers, politicians, artists, and other citizens have turned to the body for answers to this crucial question. Indeed, as demonstrated by the epigraphs from John Kerry and Ron Kovic, Vietnam veterans who have both gone on to play active roles in American politics, speaking parts in the political drama of war are still routinely associated with specific somatic credentials and are awarded or withheld largely on the basis of their presence or absence. More specifically, Kerry and Kovic suggest that war veterans bear credentials that especially entitle them to such speaking roles. Whether scarred, stumped, crippled, poisoned, pierced, burned, or simply marked by

the less visceral but still visible insignia of medals, stripes, and badges, the veteran's body has traditionally been understood to offer irrefutable material proof of a unique right to enter and shape discourse on war. After all, as Kovic points out, if you can't trust a wounded veteran to tell it to you straight about war, who can you trust?

This unique entitlement rests on what historian Eric J. Leed has called a "myth of experience" in which "the knowledge gained in experience" is presumed to be "inseparable from the person who learns, and uncommunicable to those who have not shared the experience" (28). Whatever and wherever war is understood to be, in other words, the veteran is quintessentially one who has been "there," one whose body witnesses that he knows firsthand whereof he speaks. Under the terms of this myth, this "unchanging metanarrative" that Miriam Cooke calls the "War Story" (43), veterans enjoy a legitimacy and privilege that make their words on war especially significant.[1] This has even been true of the academic study of war and war writing, in which veterans have emerged as leading scholarly commentators on the literature of the world wars, the Korean War, and especially the Vietnam War.[2] But the veterans' rightful access to subject positions where war is concerned also harbors the potential to become a monopoly over them, to reduce those whose bodies are situated differently relative to war—the men, women, and children who ostensibly "have not shared the experience" of armed conflict—to the status of uninitiated "civilians." In this scenario, civilians become those who must be protected from war experience (and from the knowledge, responsibility, authority, and power that go along with it) *and* who, in a vicious double bind, may be deemed unqualified to offer opinions about the experiences they are thereby "protected" from having.

This is a dilemma I feel acutely, as a teacher and critic struggling with contemporary representations of war and as a person whose identity was to an important extent forged in the historical crucible of war—a war, however, that I did not experience "firsthand" and indeed barely registered at all on a conscious level. Born late in 1961, I was not yet four years old when the massive troop escalations of 1965 catapulted the Vietnam War into American popular consciousness, barely six when the Tet Offensive of 1968 shook the confidence of U.S. citizens in the war effort, eleven when the Paris Accords were signed in 1973, and only thirteen when Saigon fell in 1975. No one in my immediate family, or in the families of my friends, fought or even served in Vietnam. I knew no one who died there, no one who was wounded, few who dodged the draft, no one who deserted, and of all my elders only a single person who experienced combat conditions during the war: a math teacher who had flown as a navigator on air force bombers. Even my G.I. Joe was the clean-shaven, silver-suited astronaut of the Mercury space pro-

gram, still aglow in Camelot-era optimism, rather than the grittier, bearded model ("with lifelike hair") of later years, whose jungle fatigues, thousand-yard stare, and "kung-fu grip" exuded the ambience of Southeast Asia.

Yet in other ways the war supplied this entire period of my life—including events, such as the breakup of my parents in 1968, that it in no way influenced directly—with an emotional coloration that remains hard to define but was even then palpable, impossible to deny. Even for a child, Vietnam was ever present, working its way into the fabric of imagination and memory, in the steady stream of combat footage and casualty reports on the evening news, a blur of images and numbers that played at low volume beneath the conversation at my grandparents' dinner table. The war lurked somewhere behind the peace patch I wore on my denim jacket in middle school, and had some hazily intuited thing to do with the drugged-out villains who menaced the heroes of *Hawaii 5-O*, a television series I watched fanatically.[3] And it percolated through the music and lyrics of favorite songs: Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Run through the Jungle," the Guess Who's "American Woman," even Glen Campbell's version of Jimmy Webb's "Galveston." Though it would not be until my high school years that reading Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War* would finally trigger questions about my own relationship to the war, Vietnam in many ways provided a cultural soundtrack to my childhood and early adolescence.

And so my dilemma: given the complex but urgent sense in which accounting for myself involves accounting for this pivotal historical event from my formative years, where might there be a space for me—a noncombatant with no formal military training or education—in the discourse and debate about Vietnam? When so little about my experience or embodiment seems to entitle me to speak about war, will anyone listen? Will my students attend to an instructor of war writing whose knowledge of war seems so attenuated and theoretical? Should they?

With the exception of those final pedagogical questions, these are some of the same problems that face Samantha (Sam) Hughes, the protagonist of Bobbie Ann Mason's 1985 novel, *In Country*. Reading and rereading *In Country* over the years, I have found that I identify with Sam more strongly than with any other character I have ever encountered in a work of literature. Born in 1966, the daughter of a soldier killed in action in Vietnam and niece of a veteran psychologically (and perhaps physically) wounded there, yet fully awakened to the exigencies of war only at her high school graduation, Sam is a character whom many of my generation can relate to. Her deep fascination with war, her sense of its historical impact and moral weight, her pressing desire to understand it and to reflect on it intelligently, and her exasperating lack of the culturally sanctioned credentials for undertaking such a project or being recognized as legitimate in that undertaking—all resonate

powerfully. Sam's difficulties, moreover, are compounded by her gender. To many around her, her female body works to disqualify her from any hope of achieving an authentic knowledge of war. As her uncle Emmett Smith testily puts it, "Women weren't over there," by which he means that "they can't really understand" Vietnam (Mason 107). This comment, a variation on the myth of war experience cited by Leed, is a minor refrain throughout *In Country*. Never mind for the moment that Emmett is, historically speaking, dead wrong: women *were* "over there" in a variety of capacities, as Sam herself is aware. The point is that Sam's experience is at issue, contested in one way or another, on practically every page of the novel.[4] The very experiences that carried such numinous authority for the Vietnam generation, the ones extolled, for instance, with near-mystical fervor in the Jimi Hendrix anthem "Are You Experienced?"—sex, drugs, and rock and roll—are already old hat to Sam, who is sexually active, on recreational terms with marijuana, and a devotee of MTV and classic rock. War, however, and Vietnam in particular, is terra incognita, where her experiential deprivation meets its terrible antithesis in Emmett's experiential overload.

Sam's interest in war is from the start overdetermined. Fathered by a warrior, she is the namesake of the national icon whose face and outstretched finger adorn U.S. military recruitment posters—an irony intended by Mason, as we will see. If her name thus suggests a quintessential Americanness, a representative national identity reinforced by her modest life in small-town Hopewell, Kentucky, it also serves to remind us of the dark origins of that identity in near-perpetual warfare. In his classic study of American myth, Richard Slotkin has traced the foundations of the American psyche to Manichaean visions of internecine struggle resulting in cycles of collective violence against the indigenous peoples and environments of the North American continent (see especially 3–56). These visions resurface in the Reagan-era time frame of Mason's novel. Set against the backdrop of the 1984 presidential campaign, *In Country* captures a renewed national preoccupation with military strength and preparedness and with evil enemies abroad. Sam encounters this recrudescent militarism firsthand in the person of her graduation speaker, "a Methodist minister" who unnerves the girl with his rhetoric "about keeping the country strong, stressing sacrifice" (Mason 23). It is this event, more than any other, that propels Sam on her quest to understand war, a "mission" that seems, no less than the graduation ceremony itself, to function as a commencement exercise for Sam, in much the same way that Dwayne Hughes's departure for Vietnam, following his own high school graduation, signaled the formal commencement of *his* life as an adult and citizen. Learning more about this dead father, a man she never met, will become a central element in Sam's quest for the meaning of war, for her own time as well as his.

At its outset, then, *In Country* is organized around a relationship between bodies. On one hand, there is the crucially absent body of a dead veteran who returned from Vietnam to a closed-casket funeral, his remains having been pronounced unviewable by the U.S. government (Mason 197)—a body that in the most emphatic and intimate sense "knew" war and was marked by that knowledge in a way that would seem to attest to its finality and incommunicability. On the other hand, there is the intensely present body of a female protagonist going through the dramatic changes of late adolescence, in which her physical appearance—her weight, musculature, athleticism, and sexual attractiveness—becomes the subject of incessant commentary among her friends and relatives (see, for instance, 5, 39, 45, 47, 129, 186, 193, 199). Disembodiment meets hyper-embodiment, and the novel hinges on whether that "contact" (to invoke a resonant bit of combat slang) can ever be genuinely epistemological, whether there can be a way for Sam to bridge the seemingly absolute gap between her father's body and her own and thereby give voice to the knowledge he so jealously guards in the grave.[5] It is as if Mason has taken the epistemological barriers confronting Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (between the present and the past, between the living and the dead), factored in additional ones that raise the stakes even higher (between the noncombatant and war, between a woman and a traditional domain of men's experience), and given the whole sprawling dilemma an explicitly somatic dimension. In this context, "Tell me . . . about Vietnam" (Mason 54) acquires the same mythic resonance as Shreve's injunction to Quentin to "Tell about the South" in Faulkner's novel.[6] In the quest to tell, know, or even feel the significance of that story, Sam and the narrative proceed through a series of epistemological stages and strategies, ways of knowing that take Sam deeper and more comprehensively into the meaning of war even as their focal points appear to move further and further from the body and experience of the combat soldier.

Historical Reconstruction

How, then, to relate to, and to render with an authenticity worthy of the body's felt reality, a knowledge that neither one's history nor one's gender seems to qualify one for, entitle one to? Perhaps predictably, Sam's earliest forays in this direction involve attempts to get out of her own body, to escape the epistemological limitations of her subject position in favor of a historical detachment that might permit a more objective, disembodied assessment of war. The way to war appears to be through Dwayne, through reconstructing as accurately as possible the ins and outs of his lost Vietnam world. The presumption is that Sam's own experiences in her contemporary stateside

world can only be impediments to the knowledge she seeks; at this stage in her quest, she shows little interest in their potentially exemplary or analogical value. Instead, she turns to the words and experiences of others as she begins to sift through a rich variety of historical raw materials ranging widely in reliability and immediacy.

Sam quickly learns, however, that conceding authority so readily to historical sources can bring its own frustrations. Combing history books and other written records of the war in Vietnam, including "manifestos and State Department documents" (Mason 55), she finds that these materials have nothing to say about "what it was like to be at war over there" (48). One gathers that these accounts, focusing on overarching geopolitical patterns and written in dull, arid prose ("The books didn't even have pictures"), simply bypass the human experience of war altogether in favor of "managerial" perspectives from on high.[7] Television shows like *M*A*S*H* (24ff.) and movies like *Apocalypse Now* (217), which focus on small groups of characters rather than large historical forces or military campaigns, seem to offer a closer approximation of what Sam is seeking. It is not simply postmodern irony, for instance, that it takes Colonel Blake's death in Korea on *M*A*S*H* to convey to Sam fully the pathos of her father's death in Vietnam: "Each time she saw that episode, it grew clearer that her father had been killed in a war. She had always taken his death for granted, but the reality of it took hold gradually" (25). Rather, Mason's point would seem to be that a series like *M*A*S*H* provides a deceptively relevant means of understanding the particular historical experience of Vietnam, a televised, "living-room war" whose phenomenology, as many have noted, seemed to come straight out of electronic media and whose soldiers so often arrived overseas toting a personal mythology of war assembled largely from television and film images, a mythology that glamorized armed conflict while minimizing its ambiguities and risks.[8]

Even *M*A*S*H*, however, lacks the local resonance of the many stories still freely circulating around Hopewell that focus on Vietnam soldiers and veterans. Sam's work soliciting and collecting these stories is a modest, impromptu version of the important work performed by oral historians in capturing the many faces and moods of the American experience in Vietnam (see, for instance, M. Baker; K. Marshall; Santoli; Terry; K. Walker; James Wilson). Many of the storytellers interviewed or simply overheard by Sam are noncombatants: Hopewell natives gossip ambivalently about Emmett, still unsure whether Vietnam veterans are heroes or troublemakers (Mason 31); Emmett's parents debate the meaning of his malaise (149–150); Dwayne's parents offer a bittersweet account of their son's terrible posthumous homecoming (195–200); and Irene Joiner, Sam's newly remarried mother, shares memories of Dwayne, Emmett, and the Vietnam years (167–171, 232–236).

For all their close emotional ties to the combatants, however, these individuals can offer few specific details on the experience of being at war.

For that, Sam turns to the veterans themselves. She listens in on conversations and arguments on the courthouse square (90–91), at a veterans dance at the Hopewell community center (109–125), and at rap-group-like gatherings at the local McDonald's (46–50). She also probes for information from local vets like Pete Simms (133–136); Tom Hudson, in whom Sam develops a romantic interest with a distinct epistemological dimension as well as a more straightforwardly sexual one (77–80, 93–96, 126–129); and of course her uncle (35–36, 51, 54, 221–226). As historical resources, the vets are rewarding at times, strangely reticent or discouraging at others. On the one hand, they differ instructively in their opinions about the feasibility and significance of the war, countering any assumption of a monolithic "truth" of war or even a monolithic veteran's perspective on it. While Pete, for instance, confesses that he "felt good" in Vietnam, enjoyed the sense of purpose and "the intensity of what you went through together" (134), Emmett will acknowledge only a single happy memory of his entire year there (36), and Tom mourns the destruction of the country's natural beauty (95). On occasion, the veterans also achieve moments of revelatory sensory detail in recounting their experiences in the combat zone. Here, for instance, is Tom Hudson: "Once I saw a palm tree disintegrate, if you can believe it. One minute it was a tree on a postcard . . . and the next minute it just exploded and disappeared. At first I thought it took off into outer space. It was like something out of science fiction" (94). And here are Emmett's most vivid memories of his tour: "The smell of fish sauce. . . . And human shit in the rice paddies. And all those people pedaling their bicycles" (54). Some of Emmett's earliest stories of the war are multimedia productions, with "plastic models of helicopters and jet fighters" serving as props to lend a concrete visual element to the telling, and old postage stamps from "Indochine" supplying a rudimentary, if anachronistic, sense of setting (51).[9]

On the other hand, the vets are still in many ways struggling to determine the meaning of their war stories. Emmett, for instance, can be maddeningly evasive about Vietnam. "There ain't no way to tell it," he insists. "No point. You can't tell it all" (222). Tom is equally cryptic. "It was real, all right," he tells Sam. "You don't want to know how real it was" (95). The proprietary attitude toward war hinted at in that last statement is typical of the vets, resurfacing more explicitly in Pete's comments, where it stops just short of outright hostility: "Stop thinking about Vietnam, Sambo. You don't know how it was, and you never will. There is no way you can ever understand. So just forget it. Unless you've been humping the boonies, you don't know" (136). Tom puts it more gently: "Look, Sam. It's hard to talk about, and some people want to protect you, you know. They don't want to dump all this stuff

on you" (95). Even he seems to agree that such "protection" is necessary, that the knowledge of war's mysteries is best reserved for veterans alone.

The bodies of the veterans seem to substantiate this proprietary stance. A number of them have been physically marked by their war experience in ways that attest to its lasting impact. Tom, for instance, carries shrapnel in his back that forces him to hold himself at a stiff, "funny angle" (110), an injury he attributes with characteristic vagueness to "[b]eing in the wrong place at the wrong time" (95). The tiny bumps of the shrapnel can still be felt beneath Tom's skin, as Sam learns upon going home with him after the veterans dance. On the same night, she also discovers that he is impotent, incapable of progressing beyond foreplay, as if he too, like the Volkswagen with the frozen transmission that Sam hopes to buy from him, is plagued by mechanical problems that leave him unable to shift into high gear (126–127). The subtle analogy is typical of Mason's associative style, as is her decision to install Tom, an auto mechanic, in a *body* shop suggestively named Kustom Kollision (47, 76).[10] Sam compares the labor of "recreat[ing] beautiful cars out of a mess of greasy metal pieces and rusty pipes and screws" to magic, but a better metaphor might be surgery, as if working on cars offered Tom a compensatory version of the body work he is unable to perform on his own battered frame and the metal pieces still lodged therein.

At least two other Hopewell veterans appear to suffer from somatic problems specifically traceable to combat duty. Buddy Mangrum is afflicted with a variety of symptoms, including "[n]ausea, the runs, jaundice, chloracne," muscle spasms, insomnia, weight loss, and bloody urine, which suggests exposure to Agent Orange (111). By novel's end he has been hospitalized for liver trouble (220), which may well be part of the same syndrome. On top of that, his young daughter suffers from birth defects, including severely twisted intestines that require an expensive operation to be rerouted (91). If this condition too is the work of Agent Orange—if the legacy of Vietnam is transmissible from fathers to daughters—the significance would not be lost on Sam.

Emmett's maladies include digestive problems, skin rashes, and severe headaches, leading Sam once again to suspect Agent Orange. She also fears that her uncle may share Tom's mysterious sexual dysfunction, since he seems so aloof toward women (130). Whether such fears are grounded, however, is ultimately less significant than the terrible overabundance of somatic signs in the world of the veterans, all of which seem to signify war. Throughout *In Country*, Emmett's pain, his constant bodily misery and mental anguish, is such an essential part of his story and psyche that Sam can only see it in terms of that other, equally essential part, Vietnam. Agent Orange offers one way to do this, with dioxin functioning as the interpretive "agent" that permits one to read war's lingering, devastating influence on(to) the vet-

eran's body. Later in the novel, the tears and wrenching sobs that accompany Emmett's most traumatic combat memory will function in a similar manner, conveying a sheer enormity of experience that seems absolutely personal, absolutely incommensurable—more in keeping with Elaine Scarry's account of unshareable pain (see chapter 4) than with sentimental fiction's emphasis on the ability of tears to activate the power of sympathy. Mason lets the scene gather power, then pushes it unexpectedly, unbearably on:

> Emmett's head fell forward with sobs. He cried. Sam hadn't seen him cry like that. The sobs grew louder. He tried to talk and he couldn't. He couldn't even smoke his cigarette.
>
> "Don't talk," she said. He kept crying, his head down—long throaty sobs, heaving helplessly. . . . She went into the woods to pee and when she got back he was still crying. He sounded exactly like a screech owl. She touched his shoulder, and he shoved her hand away and kept crying—louder now, as though now that they were out in the woods, and it was broad daylight, and there were no people, he could just let loose.
>
> His cry grew louder, as loud as the wail of a peacock. She watched in awe. . . . Emmett's sorrow was full-blown, as though it had grown over the years into something monstrous and fantastic. His cigarette had burned down, and it dropped over the railing.
>
> They walked back to the car. Sam sat in the car and Emmett, still crying, sat on the hood. His bulk made the car shake with his sobs. (223–224)

To my knowledge, no one, and certainly no man, has ever cried like this in a novel: so convulsively and grotesquely and at such narrative length. Sam is simply stunned. It is as if Emmett has appropriated the weeping function conventionally assigned to women in war representations and carried it to the outermost reaches of emotional *and physical* intensity.[11] There seems to be nothing one can say to such a performance, no room for affective or historical dialogue. It simply speaks for itself, at the limits of human expressibility, authenticating Emmett's awful knowledge all over again.

On a lighter note, Pete Simms supplies a final image of the veteran's body as indelibly "marked" by war experience. While a soldier in Vietnam, Pete has in an impulsive moment had the Jackson Purchase area of western Kentucky tattooed on his chest in red and blue ink, complete with individual towns, his hometown street, and his classic Corvette (49). In its own homely way, the tattoo reveals something meaningful about the somatic signification of war. At one point Pete ruefully observes, "I look at it upside down, and in the mirror it's backwards." In other words, Pete's tattoo is designed for *others* to see and "read." Even the more explicitly traumatic marks of war are culturally constructed in much the same way, as badges of honor and bravery that secure the recognition, admiration, or compliance of an audience of civilian "readers." Wounds too are meant for others to contemplate.

With war and (male) bodies thus linked in such mutually authorizing ways, there can be little wonder that men who by historical accident find themselves "between wars" feel deprived, even ashamed, as if accosted by their own unscathed bodies, like latter-day Percy Grimms. This is true both of Sam's sometime boyfriend, Lonnie Malone, and of Lonnie's father, Bud. "I was lucky, I guess," Bud reflects. "But I never felt right about it. My daddy and his daddy both fought, and I felt like I missed out on something important" (86). With that notion of an indescribable yet crucial "something" intrinsic to war, we are back to epistemological square one. Those who "fought" have it, and the rest of us, to our everlasting detriment, don't. War remains the discursive property of warriors.

By 1984, however, the Vietnam veterans of Hopewell are all a decade or more removed from war. It could therefore be argued that even their powerfully charged accounts of war are rendered unreliable by the intervening years, that new experiences, postwar hindsight, and the vagaries of memory have combined to distance the vets from their own experiences, limiting their effectiveness as historical sources. It seems to be a major epistemological breakthrough, then, when Sam discovers a bundle of letters that her father sent to her mother from Vietnam (179). Here at last, it appears, are the primary texts of war that Sam has been waiting for, handwritten dispatches from experiential ground zero, bearing the direct physical impress of a body at war and offering the combatant's firsthand reflections rather than the veteran's belated reminiscences.

Yet Dwayne's letters prove to be a huge disappointment. His words yield almost no insight into the subjective elements of combat experience and do almost nothing to substantiate Bud Malone's conviction that "something important" resides at the heart of war: "He didn't say whether he felt lonely or if he was having a good time or if he was miserable" (181). Coy, uninformative, clichéd, and sentimental, the letters seem sanitized for home consumption, "full of silly things and little lectures telling Irene to be good" (182). Significantly, they lack margins, as if designed to resist meaningful readerly interaction (179). In this context, one can imagine Sam's frustration on coming across passages such as "It's different here. It's not what I imagined, but I guess I'll get by" (180); "Let's just say it's not a place where you'd want to go for a Sunday drive" (181); "You asked about the people here, they're real little and don't know English" (181); "I'm proud to serve my country and I'm doing the best job I can. With your prayers, I know we'll succeed" (180). Once again Sam feels herself "protected" from war, immured in ignorance, as her mother must have felt upon originally reading the letters. "It almost seemed," Mason writes, "that he was playing a joke on [Sam], a guessing game, as if he were saying, 'Know me if you can'" (183). This joke, however, has no punch line, offers no sense of closure, leaving the biggest mystery of

all still shrouded in narrative silence: "There was no telegram, telling how it ended" (179).

A final opportunity to know war through the warrior emerges in the form of a combat diary that Dwayne's parents pass along to Sam a few days later. Whereas the letters mocked the historian with their bowdlerized accounts of war, Dwayne's diary entries, written for himself alone, are more unguarded and revealing in their form as well as their content. This time, for instance, Dwayne's handwriting, "small and squinched" and "stagger[ing] off the lined paper," directly conveys frontline realities. We sense the furtiveness and stress of a body at risk, seizing brief moments for reflection, perhaps under cover of darkness (201). Indeed, Dwayne himself is well aware how dangerously much his handwriting reveals about his body, including its position: "The pencil makes swishing noises and sounds so loud I'm afraid it'll draw Cong like flies" (202). Under such conditions, every word represents a crucial expenditure of energy and karma, a fact that helps account for the terse, paratactic style of the diary passages. Michael Herr offered as the paradigmatic Vietnam narrative a long-range scout's haunting, inflectionless description of a failed recon mission: "Patrol went up the mountain. One man came back. He died before he could tell us what happened" (6). Some of Dwayne's diary entries capture precisely this combination of pared-to-the-bone minimalism (not so unlike Mason's own style) and expansive resonance. One, for instance, speaks volumes about the Sisyphean absurdities of the American war effort: "*July 3*. Spent all day cutting trees up a hill. Got there and saw another hill and more trees" (Mason 201). Others are even more elliptical: "Sappers spotted, M-79 grenade launchers, 40 rounds spent" (but what became of the sappers?); "We need rain but my feet stay wet" (202). Vietnam has become a Zen koan.

The diary holds other revelations as well. According to Grandma and Grandpa Hughes, for instance, Dwayne never drank, smoked, or cursed, but in the combat zone Dwayne tells a different story: "*July 5*. Smoked cigarettes in the dark, hiding them in helmets. Helmets used for everything but to shit in" (202); "*Aug. 4*. Darrel got it. It was over with before we knew it. Goddam, it was awful" (204). The explicit mythoclasm adds to the diary's authenticity. So does its inventory of bodily details, the somatic legacy of combat duty: cracked, bleeding hands, chronic diarrhea, sore muscles and constant fatigue, shaking knees in the aftermath of an ambush, immersion foot ("Feet look like boiled chicken's feet," Dwayne writes; 204), cuts, scabs, insect bites, malaria. In country, bodily exigencies can be fatal: a loud fart represents an unforgivable breach of cover (203), and Darrel is ambushed and killed when he goes off alone to answer nature's call (204). Here and elsewhere in the diary death appears as a physical rather than metaphysical event: unlike the letter to Irene that describes Darrel as "a guy in my outfit who isn't with us

anymore" (182), the diary recognizes death as something that happens to the body: "Darrel had blood shooting out of his back and his mouth. . . . He lost too much blood. The medic was covered in his blood" (204).

Not Darrel, however, but a nameless enemy soldier provides the diary with its most graphic image of war's impact on the body: "*July 17*. Two days ago, we come upon a dead gook rotting under some leaves, sunk into a little swamp-like place. They probably hadn't found it because it was covered up with big banana leaves. Interesting to see the body parts broken down, like we studied in biology. It had a special stink. Dead gooks have a special stink, we know by now. Bobby G. poked a stick around in it and some teeth fell out" (203). Despite Dwayne's suggestion to the contrary, this is no mere anatomy lesson. It's also a lesson in war. The reduction of the body to "parts" is not just something that nature accomplishes in swamps. It is also something that human beings accomplish, with terrible efficiency, on battlefields. Indeed, the desecration that Bobby performs with his stick simply continues the process begun earlier by a bullet or bomb or grenade. It might be revealing to think of war as a drastically accelerated form of decomposition, pursued through technological means and—war's signature horror—brought to bear upon living bodies as well as dead ones. If so, then Dwayne's clinical attitude masks the scene's supreme irony: he too will soon come to embody this truth of war. He may not know it, but he is contemplating his own future on the jungle floor. Within a month, he will complain in the diary that his feet "look like they're rotting off" (204). And soon after that, he will be blown to pieces by an anti-personnel device, one more legacy of the reciprocal, consensual injuring that is for Scarry the defining condition of all war (*The Body* 63–81). In Sam's gruesome imagination, "His corpse in the body bag was probably like hamburger" (Mason 102).

Dwayne's diary is about as far as a reader can go into the somatics of war. If Tim O'Brien is justified in his assertion that a true war story "makes the stomach believe" (84), then Sam's nauseated response to the diary (Mason 205) would appear to confirm the authenticity of its details. Yet it still poses the classic problem of all trauma literature, a problem articulated by Kali Tal (232): to read about a deeply embodied, shattering experience is not and can never be the same as having the experience. It is true, of course, that Dwayne's most fully embodied encounter with war, his death, cannot even be read about in the diary, though it is arguably *registered* there in the visual silence following the final entry of August 16. Events that can be read about, however, prove just as recalcitrant to understanding. One of the diary's major revelations, for instance, is that Dwayne has not only died in Vietnam but killed there as well. About the act of killing, however, he has only this to say: "*Aug. 14*. Big surprise. Face to face with a V.C. and I won. Easier than I thought. But there wasn't time to think. It was so simple. At last" (Mason

204). What Sam most wants to glean from these clipped sentences simply vanishes into the cavernous spaces between them: "Her father hadn't said how he felt about killing the V.C. He just reported it, as though it were something he had to do sooner or later, like taking a test in school" (205). The combatant's secrets remain ineluctably his. In a sense, Dwayne Hughes is like the doomed ranger in Herr's ur-narrative: he has died before he can tell us what happened.[12] Sam's frustration simply underscores the way in which the epistemology of historical reconstruction legitimates war and the warrior figure by positioning the civilian as the passive recipient of an authoritative yet hopelessly partial war knowledge. If, as we have seen in earlier chapters, the abstract, disembodied canons of Castronovo's necro citizenship render the historically situated, contingent body a political liability, Mason's novel suggests that a different dynamic may be at work in the case of the soldier-citizen, whose concretely positioned body—located "over there," "in country"—is at the heart of his claim to authority. As Sam discovers, the political liability lies not in having a body, nor in being historically situated, but in being situated *differently* with respect to war, away from the space of combat. Moreover, the novel's depiction of the hyper-embodied condition of the veterans suggests in turn that what the battlefield offers, politically speaking, is not so much proximity to death, the disembodied spectrality of the necro citizen, as a strangely empowering form of access to trauma, the bodily risk assumed in the nation's name. Making a virtue out of what would ordinarily, in the universalizing discourse of national belonging, be the defect of embodiment, the soldier-citizen thus vaults to the front ranks of the polity, first among embodied equals. Or so at least it seems to Sam at this initial stage of her mission.

Reciprocal Metaphorization

Up to this point, then, Sam has conducted her quest for the meaning of war as if the soldier's body were everything and her own body merely a vexing obstruction to be transcended or circumvented. With the failure of her historical sources to deliver the goods, however, she will strike out in a new epistemological direction, turning to a different body as a potential vehicle of insight into war. No longer content to reconstruct cognitively the Vietnam soldier's experience in country, she sets out to reenact it, mounting an overnight expedition to the swamps of Cawood's Pond, "the last place in western Kentucky where a person could really face the wild" (208), in order to find out firsthand what "humping the boonies" is all about.

Again, her mission meets with mixed results. On one hand, it brings genuine insight. Sam experiences for herself the sharpened sensorium of the combat soldier, as "the vacancy of the air" around her gradually fills "with

a complex fabric of sounds" (211). She discovers the spooky sentience of the jungle at night (214), and she becomes acutely aware, as her father was before her, of how conspicuous and vulnerable the body can be rendered by its sounds and odors (212–213). She intuitively reproduces many of the basic bodily movements dictated by the exigencies of jungle warfare: creeping, crouching, wading, and so on. The rashes and insect bites that she sports after her long night recall some of the same somatic badges of jungle duty mentioned in Dwayne's diary (215; cf. 204). She experiences the foreshortening of temporal perspective characteristic of combatants focused on surviving one day, and one night, at a time (216). And in fashioning a crude weapon out of a can of smoked oysters, she displays a resourcefulness, born out of the urgent necessity for self-protection, reminiscent of her father, who envisioned using a lit cigarette to disable an enemy soldier (216; cf. 202). Perhaps most illuminating is the alertness, exhilaration, and fear that Sam experiences on hearing the footsteps of an unknown figure approaching through the swamp. Here, she believes, in her own sensations of being hunted, spied upon, in immediate danger, she has at last isolated the elusive felt reality of the war in Vietnam: "A curious pleasure stole over her. This terror was what the soldiers had felt every minute. They lived with the possibility of unseen eyes of snipers. They crept along, pointing the way with their rifles, alert to land mines, listening, always listening. They were completely alive, every nerve on edge, and sleep, when it came, was like catnapping" (217). Suddenly "small and fragile" and attuned to the slightest movement, Sam finds "a new way of seeing," a war phenomenology, *in*, not in spite of, her embodiment.

On the other hand, Sam is constantly reminded that her night at Cawood's Pond does not ultimately duplicate a combat mission in Vietnam. She contrasts the hickory and cypress of Kentucky with the elephant grass and rice paddies of Southeast Asia (210). Unlike the typical Vietnam grunt, she lacks the equipment and the know-how to dig a foxhole (212–213). She notes the absence of the "rock-and-roll sounds of war" and of the nocturnal "light show" of rockets, flares, and tracers from the Kentucky nature preserve (214). And for all her exhilaration and terror as the unseen figure draws closer, she feels "no rush of adrenaline, no trembling of the knees," because in the final analysis she knows that this stranger (who turns out to be Emmett, in search of his wayward niece) is not an armed enemy soldier out to kill her (218). Indeed, Sam's attempts to picture the unknown figure as a Viet Cong guerrilla or terrorist ultimately yield to the more pressing and plausible fear of a rapist or stalker (216–218). Her body, that is, breaks into the war game with its own agenda, appearing to upset the imaginative equilibrium she has briefly achieved.

But does it? The fact that the Kentucky boonies may harbor rapists, that danger on the home front takes a specifically sexual form, along with the

fact that in facing this sexual danger Sam seems however briefly to intuit what soldiers like her father felt in Vietnam, suggests that there may be many routes to war through the body. If anything, reasoning by analogy with her own embodied situation might be a more effective way for an uninitiated individual to explore what war "feels like" than the painstaking and literalistic effort to reproduce ex post facto the somatic conditions of combat. In this new way of seeing and feeling, the primary epistemological emphasis is no longer on the *reconstruction* of an unrecoverable experience but on the possible *resemblances* between that experience and one's own. It is, significantly, only when Sam's experience does *not* recede before the authority of Dwayne's or Emmett's that she makes her breakthrough. She comes closest to them, and to war, when she is most herself: a young civilian woman alone in the woods of peacetime Kentucky, aware as perhaps never before of her body's vulnerability to (sexual) attack.

In Country repeatedly suggests that young women like Sam look *to* rather than past their own bodies in order to understand war. The result would be a mode of historical inquiry that neither "overrides the boundaries of gender," as Michael Kreyling puts it (*The South* 102), nor balks before those boundaries as insurmountable epistemological barriers, but instead descends deeper into gendered experience for insight. As critic Katherine Kinney has also noted, the novel develops a series of functional and phenomenological analogies between the war experiences of young men like Emmett, Dwayne, and Tom, and an entire range of experiences associated with the sexual and reproductive maturity of the female body, including erotic desire, foreplay, intercourse, pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, miscarriage, birth defects, abortion, contraception, harassment, rape, and, more marginally, pornography and prostitution (though, curiously, neither menstruation nor orgasm): a virtual anatomy of sexual risk and reward. This is much the same constellation of experiences I discussed in chapter 5 under the rubric of difficult embodiment. There it offered a bracing corrective to the idealizations and evasions of the southern romance plot, the false promises of ethereal happiness and self-realization through love, marriage, and family that this cultural narrative holds out to young women like Porter's Miranda, especially via the dauntingly glamorous but strangely insubstantial figure I dubbed the necro belle. Stories and scenes of difficult embodiment circulate throughout Porter's plantation world as critical countermemories, material reminders of a woman's lot in the old order, the sexual and reproductive labors that await her upon her initiation into the regime.

In Mason's novel, however, difficult embodiment takes on new dimensions as a conceptual and experiential resource. It continues to point to the hazards that attend female coming of age, hazards that are if anything even more grim and disturbing in the late twentieth-century United States than in the

Victorian and turn-of-the-century social order of Porter's tales. In this sense Sam can be seen as a direct literary descendant of Porter's Miranda. But in Sam's case difficult embodiment also points beyond this explicitly gendered context to offer imaginative access to the traditionally masculine domain and limit experience of war. It offers Sam the epistemological asset that Porter's Sophia Jane yearns for in "The Journey," a window onto "the delicious, the free, the wonderful, the mysterious and terrible life of men!" (K. A. Porter 335).

As Sam learns, women's sexual and reproductive experiences create veterans and inspire war stories in some of the same ways that battle does. Like war, after all, sexuality in this wide sense functions as a culturally central initiation experience, effecting a deep structural change in personality "that transforms the character and condition" of the subject "from that of an innocent to that of a bearer and administrator of a potent wisdom" (Leed 74). Like war, "a nonverbal, concrete, multichannel learning experience that can never adequately be reproduced in mere words" (74) and that is therefore "recalcitrant to theoretical control" (Walzer 46), sexual and reproductive experience brings about a crisis in representation, testing and stretching the limits of language and other sense-making resources. No doubt as a result, it generates gossip, rumor, and superstition almost as obsessively as war does. Like war, it serves as the occasion for a particularly intense form of bonding among initiates, centering not just on shared experiences but on the ritual commemoration of those experiences through storytelling and ceremony. Like war, it involves a complex spectrum of ethical issues ranging from the conferral and preservation of life to the taking of it. Like war in Clausewitz's famous formulation, it can be seen—and is often seen by feminist thinkers—as a continuation of politics by other means. And like war, it is above all a drama of the body in its exhilaration and pain, one that leaves a lasting, material imprint on the human form (cf. Scarry, *The Body* 60–157).

In Country develops these correspondences so richly, so systematically, and on so many simultaneous levels that it is difficult to know where to begin exploring them. One place to start might be Sam's preoccupation throughout her eventful summer with Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the U.S.A.* album. Sex, battles, and Vietnam come together repeatedly through the album's thematically coherent suite of songs.[13] As Sam explains to Dawn, the title song is about a jobless, disillusioned Vietnam veteran who feels betrayed by his country in the wake of his return from overseas (Mason 42). Another song specifically mentioned in the novel, "Cover Me" (103), conflates sexual intimacy and military fire support in its punning title and chorus: "I'm looking for a lover who'll come on in and cover me." The speaker here could easily be a lovelorn vet like Tom Hudson. A third song, the overtly erotic "Dancing in the Dark," again links sexuality with gunplay in its famous refrain, which

the novel cites directly: "You can't start a fire without a spark / This gun's for hire / Even if we're just dancing in the dark" (131). It is probably no coincidence that Springsteen's lyric insinuates itself into Sam's thoughts about the sexual problems of the veterans, since the words in many ways recapitulate her unsuccessful evening with Tom, which begins with dancing in a darkened gymnasium and ends with a sorely missed sexual "spark."

Sam invests that long evening with the character and atmosphere of a combat patrol. After entering an unfamiliar world of tanks, rifles, helicopters, and military gear on display at the veterans dance (110, 112), she sees a napalm flash in the orange glare of a mercury lamp as she leaves the dance with Tom (124). Her excitement mounts as she takes over for Tom's "walking point," leading him up the stairs to his apartment (125). Once there, her mission culminates in a demoralizing version of (sexual) "contact." Like so many Vietnam soldiers, Sam uses cinematic metaphors to express her sense of disorientation as the scene approaches, but ultimately veers off from, consummation: "She was aware of the slow-motion moves, the jump cuts, but they seemed to go nowhere. After a while, he pulled away from her and sat up against the pillow" (127). Sex, like a quick, nasty firefight, has degenerated into a discontinuous sensory montage that doesn't climax but only ends.

Other sexually charged situations convey the sense of exposure and risk that comes with finding oneself in "enemy" territory. In addition to Sam's fantasy of the V.C. rapist at Cawood's Pond, *In Country* documents a disturbingly *routine* climate of sexual intimidation, antagonism, and violence directed at young women, who find themselves "under fire" on the U.S. home front. If the pattern begins innocuously enough, with the unwanted flirtations of a tow truck driver (14), it soon grows more unnerving. Construction workers make leering comments about Sam's legs, and an exhibitionist flashes her as she runs through a cemetery (75). She is hired to flip burgers by a man who tells her he is looking for "some T and A to brighten the place up" (145). She repulses a pickup attempt by a complete stranger at the Paducah mall (201), and she is severely rattled by another stranger who trails her in a pickup truck during one of her morning jogs (75). In this context, the idle fantasies of Sam's friend Dawn Goodwin about making "a dirty movie" (105) or picking up businessmen in Paducah bars (43) become especially chilling. Such innocence verges on the obscene when the threat of exploitation and violence seems so constant and so very real. Indeed, when Sam gives the finger to Uncle Sam as she jogs by the local army recruiting station (76), we realize that he is simply the latest in a long line of American men to leer, point, and beckon in her direction. It is as if the military gaze and the sexual gaze have been conflated into a single objectifying stare. Something similar happens when Pete Simms lays a "large and searching" hand on Sam's posterior at the dance. As she squirms to elude the unwelcome touch, she makes

a revealing connection: "That hand had fired guns, she thought" (112). The associative logic at work here is vintage Mason, its principle drawn straight from Vietnam: search and destroy. As in the tactical imagination overseas, so in the masculine sexual imagination at home: the act of exploration is itself an act of colonization, an application of force, and knowledge goes hand in hand with aggression. Pete's touch feels like an act of war, as Mason's version of manual discourse evokes violent agency rather than, as in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, agency out of place.

Ears become another crucial site for the convergence of war and sexuality in the novel. The human ear supplied U.S. narratives of the Vietnam War with one of their defining images. Severed from enemy bodies and exhibited as "souvenirs," strung in necklaces, left to shrivel in plastic bags, or sent home to loved ones, ears became central to the war's folklore, uncanny symbols of atavism, atrocity, contagious horror. *In Country* offers a brief and seemingly obligatory version of the Vietnam ear story by Pete's wife, Cindy, who confesses to Sam that her disgust for the souvenirs brought home so long ago by her husband has left her unable to wear earrings at all (123). Significantly, Cindy is moved to tell this story upon seeing Sam decked out in two pairs of pierced earrings and learning that Dawn Goodwin has "four holes in each ear." The association that Cindy makes here is fairly straightforward, but Mason, I think, is pursuing a more complicated relationship between war and the modification of the body. Dawn, we may recall, is introduced at an ear-piercing scene, driving needles through Sam's lobes for that second pair of earrings that Cindy will later notice (38). The girls associate their sophisticated look with being "bad" or "wild," the latter a word that Dwayne uses in his diary to describe the exhilarating aftereffects of combat (202). Sam and Dawn seem to mean that pierced ears convey a sexual aura, making them look mature, adventurous, and attractive, while additionally offering an antidote to the stifling routine of Hopewell life. "I get bored easy," Dawn says, "so when I get bored I just stick another needle in my ear" (40). The same promise of authenticity, adventure, and novelty that leads the girls to put their bodies on the line here is also, of course, one of the perennial attractions of war and the military, one that led many a young man of the Vietnam generation to mortgage body and soul overseas. Philip Caputo, to cite a real-life example, decided to join the marines primarily to escape the same small-town doldrums that seem to plague Dawn. "I was sick of the safe suburban existence I had known most of my life," he writes, with its "rows of centrally heated split-levels that lined dirtless streets on which nothing ever happened" (4–5). And what led Ron Kovic into the military was a craving for much the same sort of attention that Sam and Dawn pursue with their earrings. "I wanted to be stared at and talked about in the hallways," he recalls (63). Predictably, both men were wounded in Vietnam, their bodies invaded

by war. *In Country* firmly reminds us, however, that being pierced by shards of metal and the special aura that comes (for better or worse) from having one's body altered in this fashion are not the exclusive province of war veterans. For a young woman like Sam, imaginative access to the shrapnel wounds of a Tom Hudson, and to the motives that led young men to subject themselves to the bodily danger of the war zone, is not necessarily the adolescent pipe dream it might seem. Indeed, it may lie as near as her own jewelry box or the local mall.

As depicted throughout *In Country*, however, the somatic experience that seems to approximate war most closely and revealingly for women is *maternity*, if we can understand by that term a dense cluster of reproductive experiences and choices, all of them hyper-embodied, intensely emotional, and far-reaching in their consequences, and some of them involving substantial physical risk. *In Country* doesn't invent the analogy, of course. Many of the deep cultural connections between maternal and military experiences, including the high status typically assigned to both in traditional societies, have been traced in important work by Nancy Huston ("Matrix" 130–134) and Jean Bethke Elshtain (221–225). Mason's novel contributes to this line of critique by developing a full-blown subplot around the subject of motherhood and interlacing it with the central narrative thread probing the riddle of war. If the pivotal figure of the main plot is Dwayne Hughes, the pivotal figure of the subplot is Dwayne's near-anagram, Dawn.

"Nothing's as dangerous as we're led to believe," Dawn suggests to Sam. "Nothing, that is, except screwing" (Mason 82). Dawn has learned this the hard way: she makes the remark while shopping for a home pregnancy test, which turns out positive. As Dwayne's adult life "commenced," shortly after high school graduation, with war, Dawn's is commencing, in the immediate wake of her own graduation, with the prospect of maternity. Indeed, just hearing about Dawn's condition sets Sam's "insides stirring" (81) in a somatic response that directly anticipates her reaction to her father's diary (cf. 205). Pregnancy is immediately attended by rumor, much as war is. "I heard you could mix Drano with pee and find out if it's a boy or girl," Sam tells Dawn (81); "There's supposed to be a whole hidden base up north of here, but it seems like we're going in a circle," writes Dwayne (202–203).

Significantly, Sam first learns of Dawn's trouble (in chapter 11) immediately following a long interview with Tom Hudson about his Vietnam memories and experiences (in chapter 10). The arrangement of scenes seems to offer pregnancy as a potential answer to Sam's searching questions about war. The two realms of experience then converge even more fully in chapter 12, where Sam dreams of having Tom's baby. The fantasy seems to explore the prospect of taking war, in the metonymic figure of the warrior, into one's own body, of being impregnated as if by war itself. The fruit of such a union,

however, can only be a mixed blessing, and the dream quickly darkens: "In the evening, the baby had to be pureed in a food processor and kept in the freezer. It was the color of candied sweet potatoes. In the morning, when it was thawed out, it was a baby again. In the dream, this was a happy arrangement, and no questions were asked. But then the dream woke her up, its horror rushing through her. She lay there with the dream slowly receding. It was almost dawn" (83). Safely and quietly tucked away behind closed doors at night, the time of desire, the baby literally vegetates, leaving Sam and Tom free to cultivate a sexual relationship; miraculously restored by day, the time of communal responsibilities, it presumably anchors a more triangular relationship based on familial commitments. Hence the pun in the final sentence: in its deep ambivalence about pregnancy and motherhood, Sam's dream is indeed "almost Dawn."

The baby's removal by mechanical means, along with its reduction to an undifferentiated flesh-colored substance, suggests abortion as another major subtext of the dream. The explicit inclusion of abortion in the web of analogy linking martial and maternal experience is surely no thematic accident. Indeed, with the debate over abortion offering an increasingly violent approximation of war on the U.S. home front, more and more American women from Sam's era to our own have experienced frontline conditions, come under fire, in seeking to terminate their pregnancies—and this *before* subjecting their bodies to invasive medical procedures.[14] Moreover, the availability of abortion collapses the mythical distinction between women as makers and warriors as takers of life by introducing the element of violence into the generative sphere. Like soldiers, pregnant women are confronted with ultimate questions and must make life-or-death decisions.[15] For Sam, who has flirted with the idea that killing is a fundamentally masculine impulse (209), the revelation that the taking of life is confined neither to war zones nor to a single gender is a sobering one: "chills rushed over her. Soldiers murdered babies. But women did too. They ripped their own unborn babies out of themselves and flushed them away, squirming and bloody" (215).[16]

If the novel thus posits abortion as a kind of war experience, on at least one occasion the analogy cuts the other way as well. Having decided against terminating her pregnancy, Dawn is nonetheless haunted by a grotesque vision that expresses, in displaced form, her conflicted feelings about her condition and the price it will exact from her body: "Yesterday I bought a chicken at the grocery? And when I got it home and pulled out those parts inside, all wrapped in paper, I had the sickening thought that the chicken was giving birth to a creature, but it was all in parts, so they had to be stuffed in a little bag" (176). In its overt anxiety about fetal bodies and its shocking materialization of the act of mothering, Dawn's fantasy recalls Miranda's encounter with the mother rabbit and her young in Porter's "The Grave." Moreover, in

depicting birth as an evisceration of the mother's body and the infant as a fragmentary assortment of maternal "parts," the scene verges anxiously on abortion. But in the image of the grocer's tidy "bag" stuffed with body parts we also glimpse the fate of Dwayne Hughes, whose unviewable remains were cosmetically packaged by the military in much the same fashion. It is as if Dwayne, literally butchered by war, has been aborted by it as well.

Or perhaps we could say that his body has been snatched. Philip Kaufman's 1978 film, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, supplies *In Country* with a particularly evocative image of the somatic links between war and maternity. The film airs on television just before one of Irene's rare visits from Lexington (154–155). After debating the ending with her mother, Sam begins to associate the film's premise with pregnancy and maternity, comparing Dawn's condition, for instance, to being "captured by body-snatchers" (155). In the film, vegetative pods gradually take over the identities of their human victims. Heather, Sam's baby half sister, seems similarly threatening and parasitical to Sam, "like a growth that had come loose" only to be "carried around . . . in fascination" by a host who remains "unable to part with it" (164). Heather also gives off an "odd sick smell and pulsation" that reminds Sam of the pods, which not incidentally are "about the size of a baby" (162). To Sam, still on the hither side of so many of life's important thresholds, motherhood entails a sharing of the body that seems to represent a dangerous encroachment on personal autonomy.

And so, of course, does war. The military "snatches" young men like Dwayne, Emmett, and Tom by convincing or coercing them to offer their bodies to the war machine. Many of these bodies are then snatched yet again on the battlefield, in visceral and horrifying ways. Such experiences must have been especially traumatic in Vietnam, where the failure of American cultural paradigms to make moral or even tactical sense of the war left many U.S. soldiers unable to fight with their "hearts and minds," as the saying went, but only with their bodies.[17] One could argue, moreover, that the association between body snatching and Vietnam already lay dormant in Don Siegel's original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the 1956 classic that Kaufman remade two decades later. Stephen King suggests that Siegel's film can be productively viewed as a "better dead than Red" allegory that posits communism as the creeping menace that snatches the bodies of its unsuspecting McCarthy-era American victims, enslaving consciousness while leaving outward physical form intact (19–20). On King's reading, the concept of body snatching, as introduced by Siegel, serves the same anticommunist agenda that underwrote the geopolitics of containment and led the United States into Vietnam in the mid-1950s. Rather than letting the communists snatch American bodies, the U.S. military preemptively snatched them for itself.

Whether one is ultimately recruited for martial or motherly duties, however, *In Country* suggests that the experience irrevocably marks the body. In this context, Tom's wounded back, which leaves him "stiff like a mannequin above the waist" when he tries to dance with Sam (Mason 123), finds an equivalent in Irene's dropped bladder, which results from carrying Heather too low in the uterus and prevents her from dancing too (167). Both "veterans" find one of life's simple pleasures to be compromised by the somatic legacy of their ordeals. Small wonder, then, that Sam likens the "mischance" and "stupid surprise" of Dawn's unwanted pregnancy to being ambushed by "sniper fire" (184), or that she thinks of making love with Lonnie in terms of being "shot through" with "a billion wiggle-tailed creatures" that invade her body (104). The sexual and military discourses have drawn so close as to be interchangeable.

The images of mother and warrior merge even more suggestively at Cawood's Pond, in a scene that precedes Sam's harrowing fantasy/epiphany of the "V.C. rapist-terrorist." This scene too involves an imagined encounter with a Viet Cong soldier. This time, however, the image is not of a sexual predator but of a less immediately threatening yet still troubling figure.

> She could see movement through some weeds on the side of the entrance to the boardwalk where the bank sloped down to the swamp. She saw a face, a face with beady eyes. It scared her. It was a V.C. Then she saw a sharp nose and streaks around the eyes. It was a raccoon. As she watched, the raccoon came into view, and then she saw a baby raccoon, and then another. They were large, almost grown, but still fuzzy. They climbed down the bank and stood in the water and drank. The mother nuzzled them. Behind her, two others wriggled down the bank. . . . Twice, she stared straight at Sam. And when she had all the babies together, she led them away, through the underbrush. (213–214)

What does it mean to imagine the phenomenon of combat and (instead) to encounter the phenomenon of motherhood?[18] For one thing, the scene suggests a place for the mothering function *in* combat, since the aspects of maternal caregiving it records are also characteristic of squad leaders on patrol: lining up one's young charges, getting them safely into and out of a foreign area, and escorting them onward, all the time scouting for signs of possible danger. As such, the scene recalls the work of philosopher J. Glenn Gray, who describes what he calls "preservative love" (95) on the battlefield as "maternal in kind" (79).[19] But the passage also hints at a literally embattled dimension of motherhood itself, attesting to the pervasive, perpetual struggle waged by mothers everywhere—on the home front and in the hot zones of combat—for the survival and well-being of their dependents. And it directly suggests Vietnam in its near-conflation of the war system and the domestic sphere,

which are presented as simultaneously invading and invaded by each other.[20] On the one hand, the mother and her young seem to intrude upon the space of combat, as if to offer a reminder that some women (and some children) *were* warriors in the Vietnam boonies, direct and voluntary participants in combat and terrorism.[21] Indeed, the raccoon's protective behavior suggests why mothers, when called upon, often prove excellent soldiers: what they are fighting for is so very tangible and precious to them. On the other hand, the hypothetical space of combat is here presented as a habitat, home to the raccoon and her brood, and the mother's bold stares implicate Sam as the intruder whose value-laden gaze *imposes* military significance on mother, offspring, and landscape alike, transforming indigenous territory into militarized terrain, with potentially life-altering consequences for all involved, consequences that *In Country* has already explored in multiple instances of war-disrupted domesticity in Vietnam (see Mason 51, 164, 169, 171).

The encounter with the raccoon leads quickly to Sam's reassessment of abortion (215), as if seeing motherhood *in* a war zone has prompted her to reflect on the maternal body *as* a war zone. Only a few hours later, the footsteps of the V.C. rapist will awaken her to the sexual ambushes and skirmishes still taking place on the home front. These epiphanies cumulatively indicate that a young woman may come to know plenty about war simply by inhabiting her own gendered and eminently vulnerable, pregnable body. The novel thus figuratively brings Dawn to the boonies, to the heart of Dwayne's territory, a strategy Mason acknowledges in another resonant play on words as Sam's long night "in country" draws to a close: "Dawn washed over the swamp, along with a misty fog. . . . Dusk lingered, and went through stages of dimness, but dawn was swift and pervasive" (215–216). Dawn's plot now literally pervades Dwayne's; the female body and its attendant dramas suffuse the imaginative recreation of combat duty. The puns signal a conceptual breakthrough into "the matrix of war," Huston's term for a representational and experiential field linking mothers and military figures in webs of "reciprocal metaphorization" ("Matrix" 131) and mutually illuminating war stories.

Lin Country

That matrix resurfaces in the novel's final section, in which Sam accompanies her grandmother Hughes and Emmett on a pilgrimage to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington.[22] As the three search for Dwayne's name on the black granite walls, *In Country* attests to the power of the memorial's interactive architecture and the specifically somatic responses that it elicits from viewers. Though the novel does not mention this fact, the memorial was designed by a woman, Maya Lin, who was not much older than Sam when she

submitted her plans; one could argue that its use of space both expresses and imparts a feminine perspective. Rather than monumentalizing the dead, for instance, in a vast monolithic space that reduces spectators to passive, insignificant witnesses before the authority of unapproachable heroes (think of the Washington Monument, the memorial's direct visual and architectural antithesis on the national mall), Lin works on a more human scale, one might even say a domestic one. The viewer is positioned inside the angle formed by the intersection of two walls, an outdoor space that invokes the reassuring interiority and intimacy of the home. Walls themselves, of course, are also familiar domestic images, reminders of the world shattered by Vietnam and violent death, a world indelibly marked, like the stone itself, by war. Significantly, the polished, sensuous, inscribed surface of the memorial invites a partial restoration of this lost world through the act of touch. In its solidity and materiality, it stands in for the veteran's inaccessible body, fostering the precious human intimacy cut short by the war. The power of this symbolism is undeniable; both Sam and Mamaw are moved to tears by the simple gesture of touching Dwayne's name (243–244). Rather than presenting the dead veterans as masters of war or vehicles of national destiny, then, Lin's wall commemorates them as the lost kin and cohabitants they are.

In Country takes these domestic overtones and pushes them further in the direction of the feminine. As a "black gash" in the surface of the mall, the memorial is explicitly compared to "a vein of coal exposed," but this "hole in the ground," whose edges form a dark delta with "grass growing above" it (239), also suggests the female genitalia, in terms once again reminiscent of "The Grave."[23] The visual pun implies that the memorial may be womb as well as tomb for the commemorated and the commemorating alike, that the viewer cannot enter the space where war is evoked and warriors quietly honored without also figuratively entering the space of the female body. This juxtaposition helps explain Sam's otherwise counterintuitive response to the wall. The memorial is designed to convey a number of different possible points of view on Vietnam for initiated and uninitiated viewers alike. Simply to approach it, for instance, is to be ambushed; its location below ground level means that "you come up on it sudden," as Emmett explains to Mamaw and Sam.[24] The wall's low elevation also situates the viewer in a perceptual field characterized by limitation and uncertainty rather than panoptical dominance, a field whose depth and darkness suggest the claustrophobic jungles and tunnels of Vietnam. Moreover, unlike the vital, vertical heroes of the World War II memorial in Arlington National Cemetery, thrusting triumphantly upward to raise the Stars and Stripes on Iwo Jima, the memorial's 58,000 names lie recumbent in horizontal rows on their gigantic gravestone. As she contemplates the wall, Sam's way of identifying with the veterans takes an altogether different form. Standing "deep in the pit," "in the center

of the V" formed by the intersecting sides, she is overwhelmed by a torrent of emotion "moving in her" in a visceral way. "It feels like giving birth to this wall" (240). In the very crotch of this subtly feminized space, Sam is once again powerfully reminded of the generative potential of her own body, as if her labor-like pangs are somehow in sync with the war pangs of the veteran, or even with the generative work of the wall itself, its role in bringing forth memory and healing.[25]

Indeed, insofar as we are still within the reciprocal analogies of Huston's matrix of war, Sam, having experienced the sensations of birth, simply *is* a veteran. This may be the gist of the novel's much-debated final scene, in which Sam discovers her own name inscribed on the wall, in the form of a "SAM A HUGHES," an army PFC and fellow southerner who died at Sam's own age of seventeen (244). In this context, touching that name—touching herself—takes on a quasi-autoerotic significance (the inscription is suggestively "down low"), as if to confirm that Sam wins her place among veterans primarily by getting in touch with herself, her own body, acknowledging rather than repudiating what the French would call her "sexe."[26] If so, then Mason, perhaps following Lin's lead, has given the function of the war memorial a particularly ingenious and subversive twist, turning a space usually associated with the celebration of masculine courage and sacrifice into a site for feminine self-recognition and self-affirmation. *In Country* thus opens the historically male province (or sanctuary?) of war to a woman's touch.

Bringing It All Back Home: Militarization

In his study of the embodied dimension of human reasoning and imagination, the cognitive philosopher Mark Johnson argues, against the grain of some poststructuralist work on metaphor, that metaphorical meaning is motivated, expressive of a real relation between the realms of tenor and vehicle that Johnson ultimately grounds in the shared physical experiences of human beings. "[M]etaphorical understanding," he writes, "is not merely a matter of arbitrary fanciful projection from anything to anything with no constraints. Concrete bodily experience not only constrains the 'input' to the metaphorical projections but also the nature of the projections themselves, that is, the kinds of mappings that can occur across domains" (xv). In this way the body "provides a *physical* basis for our *abstract* understanding." While this is certainly true of the metaphorical links between war experience and sexual/reproductive experience, Johnson's work can uncover only part of what motivates the relationship between those two domains, for they are connected not only *by* the common somatic denominators that his work would predict but *as* common, mutually reinforcing elements of an overarching ideological system. This system, which Cynthia Enloe terms "militariza-

tion" in her study *Does Khaki Become You?*, reaches well beyond the specific geopolitical conflicts and localized eruptions of collective armed violence generally recognized as "military" events, to include the larger economic, cultural, social, and sexual networks that make those events thinkable and practicable in the first place, the material and cognitive support structures for military activities and institutions. To see war making not as an isolated, inaccessible event confined to battlefields and bases but as an integrated system insinuating itself deep into the everyday lives of men, women, and children "behind" or "outside" the putative "lines" of "war" is, as Carol Adams has noted, to approach the subject of war along an "expanded front" (see 244–245), a risky but also necessary move that unseats combat from its privileged place in the experience and in the discourse of war. By tracing war's operation to some of the very spaces and practices from which it is ordinarily discursively excluded, an expanded-front analysis of militarization dislodges war's claims to a distinct, and distinctly *gendered*, authority among human experiences. From this perspective, the most urgent political challenge to the noncombatant seeking to understand war, to influence its direction, or to shape discourse about it is neither the *reconstruction* of someone else's war experience, as Sam attempts with Dwayne, nor the development of *resemblances* between one's own experience and war experience, as Sam attempts with the help of the mediating figure of Dawn, but the *recognition* of one's own (gendered) experience *as* war experience, as an integral element of the system that produces and perpetuates war.

Calling on women to recognize the full extent of their implication in the war system, Enloe discusses the witting and unwitting ways in which women's lives and bodies are militarized. As wives or partners, women provide an outlet for the sexual needs or aggressive impulses of male military personnel, and they are enlisted in the production of an environment of material and affective normality that helps expedite the veteran's reintegration into home-front society when hostilities cease. They offer emotional support, "waving their men off to war, writing them letters of encouragement and devotion in the field, reminding them that women's and children's safety depends on men's bravery" (5). They provide material support in the form of "cheap or unpaid labour" both on military bases and in the domestic sphere, labor that helps to "sustain the military as a self-sufficient 'community'" (48). As mothers, women are encouraged to produce future generations of warriors, to "bear children and bring up those children—especially the boys—to imagine that enlistment into the military is a natural and rewarding thing to do" (49; see also 75–77).[27] As daughters, sisters, or lovers, they function within military culture as embodiments of what male soldiers must fight to protect. As widows and bereaved mothers and sisters, they embody the "supreme sacrifice" that families, nations, and individuals are called

upon to make during wartime (84). As prostitutes, and not infrequently as rape victims, they are sexually mobilized by the military, with the acquiescence or active complicity of other "male-run institutions," such as health departments, law courts, and local governments acting in concert with military officials (26), for at least two purposes: "to satisfy individual male soldiers' presumed sexual needs and yet cause no loss to military efficiency" (29; emphasis removed) and to serve as images of feminine marginality and weakness that allow male soldiers and the military as a whole to consolidate a masculine self-image rooted in physical domination and violent struggle (13, 19–20). As nurses, cooks, laundresses, provisioners, and office workers, they help meet the logistical challenges of keeping healthy, well-fed, well-coordinated armies in the field and expediting the return of wounded soldiers to their units (see especially 92–113). As workers "on the margins of the civilian waged labour force," "a pool of underused, readily available labour," they serve as a wartime equivalent to Marx's "industrial reserve army," available to be channeled into traditionally "masculine" jobs during hostilities, when "massive male conscription" creates a "drain of labour from fields, factories, and offices" (5). Then, when peace breaks out again, they can be shuttled back into a variety of "feminized" jobs, ranging from "cleaning barracks to typing bureaucratic memos, from wiring missiles to producing television recruiting films," that further "the military's use of a country's economy for its own ends" (175). Finally, as soldiers, they reinforce militarism both explicitly and implicitly, participating directly in an intramural division of labor that continues to reserve most of the privileges of soldiering for men (122, 149–155), while subtly legitimating "the notion that the military is so central to the entire social order that it is only when women gain access to its core that they can hope to fulfil their hopes and aspirations" (17), a notion historically held by many African Americans as well, as we saw in chapter 4. It would be a serious mistake to think of these many functions as "for the duration" only, since, as Enloe explains, they remain in place after formal hostilities have ended, to sponsor a "militarized peacetime" that is no mere "short-term anomaly" but the "new normality" of our contemporary existence (190; emphasis removed). What this means is that the sexual and reproductive experiences that *In Country* posits as so uncannily *like* war are often a central *part of* it, part of the militarizing effort that helps make it happen.

This suggests that as a historian of war Sam is potentially her own best archive, witness, and focal figure—not just a belated arrival on the scene of war chasing after lost originary moments and no-longer-accessible truths, but a historical actor in her own right, undergoing, or at least underwriting, the experiences she seeks. I remain uncertain whether Sam ever achieves this level of insight into her situation. Her sense of her own militarization remains inchoate at best. But from the first pages of *In Country*, Mason presents her to

the reader as a thoroughly and complexly militarized figure. And in this respect she is hardly alone.

Sam, Emmett, and Irene, for instance, all receive or have received payments from the U.S. government that directly militarize them by defining their value in terms of their proximity to war. Irene draws compensation from the government not because she is a single mother fighting an uphill battle to enter the workforce but because she is a military widow. The entitlement system recognizes her only *through* her husband, a dead soldier (Mason 23), and only *as* the keeper of his legacy, as an image of grief, loyalty, and sacrifice. Should she choose no longer to embody these militarizing virtues, should she step down from her legitimating role and remarry, the payments will stop (67).[28] As a surviving veteran, Emmett subsists on a thin scrim of entitlement that includes education benefits (28) and government-subsidized health care at V.A. medical centers. Similarly, Sam is eligible for college benefits not as a young woman interested in furthering her education and her career prospects but as a military daughter, a role she must tacitly accept to cash the checks. Her worth to the government is the direct and sole function of Dwayne's worth as a soldier. The advantages conferred upon her come in the father's, the veteran's, name as part of a systematic effort to reproduce warrior values from which Sam cannot remain fully independent. Like Mamaw's Gold Star (14), which specifically militarizes the institution of motherhood and which Sam later associates with the gold stars handed out by piano teachers to signify a job well done (120), these forms of government recognition reroute identity toward a military agenda. And this rerouting is for feminine identities in particular: but for their varying degrees of contiguity to the dead Dwayne, Irene, Sam, and Mamaw would all be, from an official perspective, nonentities.

Even before she is born, in fact, Sam is already a militarized and militarizing figure. From the moment he learns of her existence from Irene, Dwayne begins to work Sam into his letters and diary entries as a defining part of the home-front femininity he has been called to Vietnam to protect: "Irene seems too far away to be real. But it's all for her and the baby, or else why are we here?" (202). Sam is thus appropriated, whether she likes it or not, as a principal element of Dwayne's motive and justification for war.[29] She is also explicitly constructed as the "flesh and blood" of a warrior (204), who makes her father proud by "kicking strong" in the womb (201). Even her conception is militarized. Thinking of the "teen-age romance" between her parents, she tries to find "something magic between them that had created her and validated their love" (191–192). But in the most basic sense, what has created her is war, since it is the imminence of Dwayne's departure for Vietnam that has supplied the urgency, the intensity—the "magic"—that has fueled desire during "the brief time her parents were married before he went over-

seas" (192). Sam exists because of war, her own moment of origin a complex interweaving of sexual and military exigencies.[30] Her personal history thus illustrates the convergence of militarism and pronatalism in a mutually reinforcing relationship at least as old as the Hebrew Bible, whose elaborate genealogies—"Chronicles was full of 'begats'" (183)—and equally elaborate accounts of warfare exist not just alongside but in support of each other.[31]

On a more contemporary note, Mason records a subtle but widespread routinization of violence that cannot but have a militarizing influence in modern culture, acclimating American citizens to killing and destruction as familiar and acceptable forms of problem solving, entertainment, and play.[32] Emmett's models of military helicopters and jet planes are among Sam's most fondly remembered playthings (51), and at the dance she examines "plastic toys" that include machine guns, tanks, and mortars (112), further reminders of just how early and *casually* the acculturation to violence begins in the lives of American children. On television, images of thermonuclear explosions and mushroom clouds lend drama to the video for a popular song, Nena's *99 Luftballons* (230). Emmett, Lonnie, Anita, and Sam all play video games like *Chopper Command* (184) and *Space Invaders* (89), blasting aircraft out of the sky to a soundtrack of "electronic gunfire" (102). This atmosphere of violence pervades other ordinary domestic activities as well. Granddad Smith talks "offhandedly" about shooting a dog that has grown nervous and disoriented after a bad storm (48). Pap treats his cat's "scabby ears" by lopping off part of each one. He also paints a mangy dog with a noxious ointment that is supposed to cure him—if it doesn't kill him first (198). Finally, when fleas infest Emmett's house, he reflexively "bombs" it with an aerosol poison not so unlike the air-delivered Agent Orange (207–208). The war culture that Sam has spent the better part of the novel excavating from Vietnam history has arguably begun, and persisted, at home.

Even Sam's beloved *M*A*S*H* episodes have a militarizing effect. Throughout the series, war is used to spice up the activity of medical caregiving, conferring added urgency and poignancy upon the work of doctors and nurses. Though the television series was based on Robert Altman's antiwar film of the same name, *M*A*S*H* on occasion sentimentalizes war, disseminating to a domestic audience of millions of viewers the militaristic idea that nothing can match the special camaraderie, intensity, and authenticity of life in a war zone. Sam, for instance, notices that "whenever any of the *M*A*S*H* regulars got a chance to go home, they thought of excuses to stay in Korea. . . . Of course, the series would have collapsed if the regulars had gone home, but Sam wondered if there wasn't some truth to the idea that war was attractive" (55). The famous series finale, at the time the most watched television episode in history, similarly presents a thinly veiled nostalgia for war. While the actual logic was exactly the reverse, the farewell episode ap-

pears to present the end of the Korean War as the *cause* of the end of the series, forcing the characters to sever their ties not only with each other but with a passionately loyal viewership as well. Only Sam, however, seems to be aware of the irony. While "Emmett was choked up the whole last hour, during the farewells among the characters," and "[e]ven Irene sobbed," Sam refuses to join her family and the dramatis personae in mourning the end of a war: "she thought how odd that long, tearful ending would seem to someone who had not followed the series" (107), someone, that is, unprepared for its suggestion that peace means parting, absence, and loss. The tears of her mother and uncle, however, indicate how easily home viewers could be seduced into just such ambivalence, how even a Vietnam widow—whose name *means* "peace"—and a traumatized war veteran could come to feel bereft by the *cessation* of hostilities.

The most significant way in which *M*A*S*H* contributes to the militarization of young women like Sam, however, is through the character of Major Margaret "Hot Lips" Houlihan. In many ways Houlihan is an exemplary figure. She is a strong, independent, assertive, highly skilled, and frankly sexual woman who refuses to play a passive role in her relationships with men. Sam's favorite *M*A*S*H* episode, in fact, is "the one in which Hot Lips . . . kicked a door down when she learned that her husband, Donald Penobscott, had requested a transfer to San Francisco without telling her" (25). Houlihan is also, however, a troubling example of how women's lives become implicated in the war system. As a combat nurse and army officer, she participates directly and willingly in a military effort, but in ways that are immediately feminized and sexualized: as a (maternal) caregiver to wounded soldiers; as the lover of an army doctor, Frank Burns; and as an erotic fantasy object to any number of the male personnel of the 4077th M*A*S*H unit (a running joke in the series as in the film before it). Moreover, her nickname works to divert attention from her medical expertise and military authority (she outranks most of the men around her) to her sexuality and gender. Insofar as she is a warrior, then, she is (only) a *woman* warrior, her personal assumption of risk and her contributions to military effectiveness notwithstanding. At the same time, Houlihan is a woman whose sexual and maternal qualities can only be recognized as meaningful and valuable within the war context of the series, where her erotic power and nurturing gifts are by definition the exclusive province of military men. As a woman, she ministers to (male) soldiers; as a (female) soldier, she ministers to men. Her sexuality and gender are thus thoroughly militarized.

Mason explores these issues through the specific imagery of breasts. Well into the novel, for instance, Irene unexpectedly presents Sam with a fatigue green "M*A*S*H 4077th" T-shirt (171). The gift makes perfect sense as an expression of maternal tenderness (Irene produces it from her diaper bag),

commemorating the family's history of bonding over their favorite television show. Still, as an item purchased by a Vietnam widow and antiwar protestor at the suggestion of her antiwar veteran brother (173), the T-shirt seems a strange choice, since both its color and its more explicit visual allusions to the *M*A*S*H* series work to affix military content to the body of the wearer. This ambiguity only deepens during the following curious exchange between Sam and Irene:

> "Gah!" said Sam. "Now I can look like Hot Lips!"
> "Your boobs aren't that big."
> "Yours are."
> "Yeah, while I'm nursing. I feel like Jayne Mansfield."
> "Who's Jayne Mansfield?"
> "An old movie star. She had big jugs."
> Sam put the T-shirt on over her pajama top and admired it in the mirror. She smiled, and in the mirror, Irene was smiling behind her. (172)

Here Sam, who will later threaten to kick a door down in direct emulation of Margaret Houlihan (189), delights in her ability to fashion herself after her *M*A*S*H* heroine. The T-shirt offers a particularly meaningful way to do this, establishing an underlying affinity between Sam and Hot Lips *as* fellow nurses who have ministered to the physical and emotional needs of soldiers devastated by war. By wearing the shirt, Sam either consciously or unconsciously calls attention to the militarized function she already performs, "like Hot Lips," for men like Emmett and Tom.

But with Irene's unexpected comment, the basis of comparison between Sam and Houlihan abruptly shifts from their nurturing skills to their bodies, and the breast emerges (not without historical or cultural precedent) as an objectification of the caregiving function. Irene appears to be thinking of the actress Loretta Swit, who played Houlihan on television, but with the suggestion that Hot Lips can be summed up in terms of a large bust, that her breasts are somehow her most salient feature, the whole idea of nursing becomes redirected narrowly toward anatomy. What makes this move so problematic is the wide variety of meanings and functions already assigned to the breast in contemporary culture. If full breasts can by some trick of the imagination be correlated with the wartime caregiving of a combat nurse, they also, as the dialogue between Sam and her mother demonstrates, can be correlated with maternity itself, in the case of the lactating Irene, and with erotic appeal, in the case of the sex symbol Mansfield. By the time the conversation ends, the military, medical, maternal, and sexual functions have all converged on and in the breast, with the result that the specific value of any one of these functions threatens to blur into that of any or all of the others.[33] By draping the female form in military meaning, the T-shirt's olive drab and M*A*S*H

insignia "capture" the breast for the army, demonstrating how readily the erotic and maternal functions can be channeled into the office of a combat nurse and put to directly military uses. But by calling attention to the breasts, the T-shirt also drapes a militarized "figure" in feminine, even erotic, meaning, demonstrating how easily the military contributions of a Margaret Houlihan can be trivialized as merely sexual or maternal in character, as if nursing soldiers were simply a matter of dispensing one's breasts.

Indeed, *every* woman who nurses or has nursed a soldier in *any* capacity in this novel has attention directed in some way to her breasts—a move that seems most unusual for a woman writer in an era so attuned to the politics of the masculine gaze and its objectifying scopic economy. Irene, of course, has nursed Dwayne in a directly sexual sense and Emmett in a more broadly familial one. Anita Stevens, who works as a nurse at the local hospital (61) and devotes herself to Emmett throughout their on-again, off-again relationship, has "full breasts" (63) that are commented on repeatedly at the dance (114, 119). Dawn even wonders if Anita wears falsies: "She's got the biggest boobs I ever saw on somebody not fat" (105). Mamaw Hughes, who has nursed a soldier from infancy forward, requires "a special brassiere" to contain the breasts that have been involved in the most immediate way in the production of war matériel (4). And then there is Major Houlihan. Collectively, these characters pose a question worthy of Enloe or Huston: Without the arousing, nourishing, comforting breasts of women, would there be war at all? Would there be men to fight, and would they agree to do so? Far from some sort of answer to war or balm for it, the breast appears in Mason's novel to be a vital organ of the war apparatus.[34]

Sam's night with Tom conforms to this rule. He directs his sexual attention first to her lips (124), then to her breasts, "lifting up on them, very slowly, not the way Lonnie did, so rough and fast, as though he were squeezing red rubber balls" (126). It is as if Tom is attempting to fashion, out of a skinny Kentucky teenager, his very own Margaret Houlihan, all "hot lips" and sexy, consoling breasts. Meanwhile Sam explores his shrapnel bumps. Where her touch eroticizes his body as that of a warrior, his caresses eroticize her body, through the multilayered signification of the breast, as that of a wounded veteran's fantasy woman: pinup, mother, and nurse in one. Lonnie, we may recall, "mash[es]" Sam's breasts in bed (104), but what Tom is doing here could perhaps be called "*M***A***S***H*-ing" them. By enlisting her breasts in the physical and spiritual consolation of a soldier, he gives the female form a militarized inflection that recalls the work of the T-shirt and the television series.[35] By the next day, Sam's feelings for Lonnie have vanished entirely, and she "throb[s]" with yearning for Tom (131). Rechanneled from the civilian teenager to the brooding veteran, her desire, like her body, has been routed toward war.

The relationship between love and war, of course, also intrigued Katherine Anne Porter. In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," we recall from chapter 5, she used illness to blur the lines between love and battle and thereby to demystify the romance plot *as* a war story for Adam and Miranda. By contrast, Mason here taps directly into the domain of feminine sexual embodiment, dispensing with the mediating discourse of disease, to develop a related set of connections between love and war. Sam's relationship with Tom, Irene's with Dwayne, and Anita's with Emmett illustrate in varying ways how feminine desire comes to be militarized, inflected (and all but infected) by war. Mason thus carries on Porter's work of mining the sexual and reproductive lives of women for political and cultural insight.

Sam's incorporation into the war system takes explicitly somatic form on other occasions as well. Even apparently innocuous features of body decoration and modification can have a militarizing impact, bringing war to the surface of the human figure. We have already seen how piercing their ears allows Sam and Dawn to approximate some of the experiences of war veterans, but the particular fashion statement Sam plans to make by wearing two-inch swords in her bottom ear holes and "little stars" in the top ones (Mason 39) directly suggests military regalia, as if Sam were outfitting her own body for war, or at least for recognition in a military hierarchy. Later, after running into Tom on the courthouse square and noting how handsome he looks "in his Army outfit" (more handsome, by implication, than in the jeans and grime of an auto mechanic), Sam wishes for a pair of camouflage pants like his (91). To her, army issue is stylish; she does not seem to consider the role it also plays in legitimating military power by habituating citizens to the presence of uniformed bodies in peacetime civilian space. Even as war continues to zero in on the body, then, fashion helps render it quotidian, *disarming*.

Finally, *In Country* raises the disturbing possibility that rape has a militarizing effect on women beyond that discussed by Enloe. Rape directly militarizes women when it subordinates their bodies and wills to the sexual urges of soldiers and the army's need to maintain male morale (Enloe 34–36), but it contributes more generally to a war mentality and culture by normalizing aggression as a problem-solving strategy. Sam's frantic effort to turn the can of oysters into a weapon at Cawood's Pond reveals how the mere prospect of rape creates a climate of fear that invites violence in response. How many readers stop to question this violence? Under the circumstances it seems plucky, resourceful, entirely understandable. The irony, then, is that the same sense of bodily vulnerability that fully awakens Sam to the desperate plight of the Vietnam soldiers also lures her toward their equally desperate responses to that plight. She cannot experience their predicament without also experiencing the sources of their impulsive and often murderous violence. If we simply admire her level head and quick wits, we in effect ac-

quiesce to that violence and the martial ethos that motivates it. However unwittingly, we become part of the ripple effect of militarization.

If *In Country* has already identified war with body snatching, the subtlety, scope, and bodily immediacy of the recruitment effort we are seeing here should help us recognize militarization as an even more systematic form of that process, one that completely pervades both wartime *and* peacetime realities, ranging from the battlefield to the nursery and over all points between. With this in mind we can return to a final chilling subtext involving the *Body Snatchers* movie. Upon learning that Irene has missed the film's conclusion, Sam reveals that the entire cast of characters ultimately falls victim to the enemy within their midst: "They all got snatched" (Mason 154). This ending offends Irene's aesthetic sense, allowing Mason to have Sam make the point a second time: "Nobody got saved" (155). The subtext here is that the war system works in the same insidious way, "snatching" *everyone*, not just mothers and soldiers, in the end. The comprehensiveness of this material network impresses itself upon Sam again on the mall in Washington, where she is left with an uncanny feeling that "all of the names in America have been used to decorate" the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (245). With no one safely outside the war system, we are left to ponder its proximity to our own bodies and to reflect on the extent of our own role in it, our complicity in snatching other and future bodies for war.

Or in producing those bodies. I want to return to Sam's epiphany in Washington, her feeling of giving birth to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. At first glance, the wall might appear to give birth to its viewers, who emerge from its dark "gash" into the light of day like so many blinking infants: some bawling like Mamaw (243), others simply speechless like Sam (245), all children and heirs of the war in Vietnam.[36] The reflective surface and unexpectedly resonant names ("SAM A HUGHES") of the memorial only enhance this effect, inviting viewers to recognize themselves as fellow veterans of Vietnam, "as though all the names in America have been used to decorate this wall" (245). But as Sam more idiosyncratically experiences it, the wall constructs its viewer *as* its creator, disappearing as origin or motive force in the process. By fashioning Sam as the mother who gives birth to it, the memorial identifies her as a principal source of all it serves to evoke: the memory of Vietnam; the dead veterans, 58,000 strong; and (most unwelcome thought of all) the war that killed them. Sam, then, *becomes* Huston's matrix of war—and through the very same uterine capacity that marks woman as matrix in an Irigarayan framework. With this new way of seeing, the wall confronts its spectators with their role in engendering the terrible tragedy and absurdity of Vietnam. They are not just the war's casualties and victims but its authors and architects as well, not just its daughters and sons but its mothers and fathers. The war could never have given birth to these haunted legions had

they not, individually and collectively, given birth to it first. This is an essential part of what the wall "says" in Mason's novel. It presents Sam with the fact of her own militarization through the prismatic medium of maternity.[37]

Mirrorings

For a work of public architecture to trigger such an unusual physical reaction in its viewer may seem implausible, but *In Country*'s alertness to the fine points of the memorial's design permits a discerning reader to see in Sam's labor-like symptoms a more or less direct response to a set of sophisticated optical effects produced by the wall itself. Specifically, the novel invites us to view the memorial as a concave mirror, an object whose reflective properties have been enumerated by Luce Irigaray in her important critique of the specular framework undergirding Western patriarchal representation. As Irigaray's work will help demonstrate, the concave field delineated by the memorial's reflective surfaces works to break down the overdrawn distinctions between military and civilian, masculine and feminine, that war helps to found and perpetuate. The wall achieves this effect by acting as what Irigaray calls a burning glass, focusing Sam with a consuming intensity on the generative power of her reproductive organs. This in turn makes it possible to recognize the role played by those very organs, those turbulent concave spaces, in shoring up the war system, in keeping with Irigaray's contention that the bodies of women ultimately subtend all such totalizing systems. Once the point is extended to include civilians, who function within the war system in much the same way as women do—their bodies and productive labor providing another crucial, and crucially neglected, matrix for war—attempts to characterize either group in terms of its putative distance from or lack of war experience stand exposed as invidious mystifications. The novel's most fully fleshed-out rejoinder to such mystifications is Sam's response, as a woman and a civilian, to the concave structure and mirroring surface of the memorial.

In Country lays the groundwork for these revelations in a much earlier scene of mirroring, in which Sam wedges a photograph of her father into the frame of her bedroom mirror (66). Liberated from its former resting place inside Sam's *Collegiate Dictionary* (58), the picture of the fallen warrior immediately commands attention, "rul[ing] the room, like the picture of the President on the wall of the high school auditorium" (67).[38] The troubling authority of the photograph, its ability to steal the scene from Sam, to displace her from her own narrative, poses many of the same problems Irigaray associates with the flat mirror, a visual technology that has exerted a conceptual stranglehold over Western epistemology and ontology since Plato, to the particular detriment of women. Dwayne's photograph can best be under-

stood as *part* of the mirror into which it has been tucked, though a somewhat redundant part in the end, since, as we are about to see, it simply performs a more overt version of what Irigaray says mirrors do, only more covertly.

In the flat mirror, Irigaray argues, and in the specular economy of rational reflection and mimetic representation for which it serves as a defining trope, reality takes on a schematic, planar aspect that can only belie the curvature and depth, volume and fluidity, multiplicity and complexity, materiality and contingency of female experience and the female form.[39] Thus a woman can never truly see herself in her own right, in her difference, in such a visual economy. In the flat mirror, a woman's otherness is reflected back to her as lack, as a defective version of a male-defined and governed "phallogocentric" standard. Her sexual organs, for instance, appear in the flat mirror as a hole or wound, since the two-dimensional plane of reflection can reveal nothing of their hidden folds and fruitful depths, only the absence of a phallic norm. The teeming, flowing body of a woman is thus reduced to a caricature of itself: barren, castrated, incomplete. Irigaray calls this process specularization. A woman who looks into the flat mirror sees precisely and *only* what a patriarchal male gaze is inclined to see in her. Her distinctive qualities of body, language, and identity melt away, signifying only as the negation or dysfunction of his.

Dwayne's photograph becomes the novel's way of asserting that an objectifying male gaze is part of the intrinsic *structure* of the flat mirror. The scene in Sam's bedroom is arranged in such a way that what she sees as she looks into her mirror is identical to what the face in the picture "sees" as it looks out at her from the frame. The scene thus conflates the mirror image and the male gaze; mirror and photo conspire to make Sam see herself as her father would see her, and what she sees is above all her difference from him, a difference that, as Irigaray would predict, she quickly processes as lack. This sense of difference begins innocuously enough, with the contrast between Sam's round, "fat" face and her father's "scrawny" one: "She couldn't see any resemblance to him" (58). At the same time, however, a distinctly specular framework begins to emerge around the masculine and military standard established by Dwayne's "dark uniform," angular visage, and severe crew cut. The text thus emphasizes that the gaze—Dwayne's—in which that specular framework finds its truest expression and nearest equivalent is that of a soldier male.[40] This is another way in which the face in the picture rules the room: beyond drawing Sam's gaze to itself, it subjects her to its own. In this respect, Dwayne takes his place in what Katherine Henninger calls "a specifically southern literary legacy of staring white male" figures who compel women to internalize their patriarchal perspective (98). Held in her father's gaze—measured against the norm he embodies—Sam can hardly appear in the mirror in her own right. Her identity and distinctiveness as a woman and

a civilian are instead reflected back to her as lack, as a deviation from the characteristics of the soldier-citizen who rules the mirror as well as the room.

On a conscious level, Sam realizes that the soldier, too, is lacking; she mournfully catalogs a number of events and experiences that Dwayne's premature death has led him to miss, including the moon landing, Watergate, and the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album (Mason 66–67). At this early point in the narrative, however, she still insists on attributing a "secret" knowledge to him, a privileged understanding of war that stands out against her own perceived ignorance and lack. The mirror scene thus captures perfectly Sam's predicament in the initial stages of her historical project: discounting her own experience before the presumably more authoritative experiences of her father and other male warriors, she misses the irony that, in seeking to compensate for the holes in her own knowledge, she turns to a man who has been riddled with holes. Soon afterward, Sam will model her M*A*S*H T-shirt in front of another mirror, as if presenting a now more overtly militarized female body for inspection before its implicitly masculine standard and gaze (172).

It might appear that the scene at the memorial is simply continuous with these earlier examples of specularization. Set into the flat mirroring surface of the panels, the names of the dead veterans are positioned in a way that calls to mind the placement of Dwayne's photograph in Sam's mirror. When Sam, for instance, stands "eye level with her father's name" on the wall (244), she is also looking straight into her own reflection in the polished stone. As in her bedroom, her reflection shares a visual field with an image that looks out from the reflective surface to evoke her father's memory and perform the patriarchal gaze. On this basis it would be easy to conclude that the optics at work in the memorial obey an essentially specular logic, that Lin's granite mirror and the names etched therein work to frame the viewer within an objectifying masculine/military perspective that holds her subject to its values and standards, forcing her to see herself as she would appear in the collective gaze of the thousands of soldier-males whose names stare out of the black slabs.[41] Such a viewer "can never really know what happened to all these men in the war" (240), and her lack will only enhance their authority. This is how Sam's grandmother seems to experience the memorial: as a flat mirror in which she reads her own dependence and subordination. "All I can see here is my reflection," she tells Sam (244), and she comes away from the wall buoyed by the conviction that her dead Dwayne is still "watching over" her and the rest of her family (245). The wall, in other words, reflects Mamaw back to herself as a civilian and female object and beneficiary of the warrior male's protective gaze.

Sam's more complicated and explicitly physical response to the wall, however, hints at an alternative optics at work in the memorial's architecture, one

founded upon the properties of a concave mirror rather than a flat one.[42] Irigaray wryly notes that as the gynecologist's speculum, the concave mirror is deployed against women as an instrument of masculine inspection, intrusion, and domination. Though its curves and cavities mimic those of the female body, it is enlisted—by virtue of that very mimicry—in the visual penetration and colonization of that body as an "empty" vessel, the obverse and negation of phallic extension, plenitude, and presence. But as Irigaray points out, the concave mirror can never serve a phallic regime so unambiguously. By inverting and condensing incoming light rays, for instance, it produces images that distort the reflected object rather than reproduce it mimetically. Irigaray attributes an emancipatory potential to these "anamorphoses" that allows women to see themselves in their strangeness, curvature, and flow, released from the iron grid of specular schematization (*Speculum* 144). Evoking unruly volumes rather than pristine surfaces, the concave mirror, according to Irigaray, offers a truer reflection of a woman than the normative Cartesian coordinates of the flat mirror.

Irigaray also emphasizes the concave mirror's properties as a burning glass that concentrates light upon a focal point with luminous intensity (*Speculum* 191). As burning glass, the concave mirror elicits a primarily tactile and affective response rather than a visual and rational one; its effects are not so much seen, along the planar surfaces of specular reflection, as felt, in deep spaces of contemplation and white-hot spiritual illumination. The burning glass directs its viewer downward and inward toward a subjective knowledge rooted in the quiddities of the body and its "fires . . . of desire" (144). This knowledge, which Irigaray codes feminine and links to the mysterious, incandescent wisdom of religious mystics, such as Teresa of Avila (see 191–202), stands outside the specular order. It is an alternative, literally ecstatic wisdom, in which phallic notions of discrete identity and stable subject-object boundaries melt away before the dynamic forces of pleasure and desire. As we would expect, Irigaray sees this dissolution of the self into heat and light in affirmative terms. In front of the burning glass, as in the *miroir ardent* of the mystics (see Moi 137), the female subject can circumvent the confining categories of the specular to *feel* a feminine difference, a searing specificity, that no longer presupposes lack. The speculum thus comes full circle: if, in the hands of the gynecologist, it mimics the folded shape of women's sexual organs in order to explore and master them, here, in the form of the burning glass, it subverts the specularizing project of gynecology to return to women a sense of their own incendiary power.

Sam's epiphany at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial should be understood in these terms. Stationed "in the center of the V, deep in the pit" (Mason 240), at the focal point of the concave space established by the intersecting, mirroring panels of the wall, she stands before a gigantic Irigarayan burning

glass, which directs her down and into her own body in a moment of burning awareness focused on and through her reproductive organs, which of course occupy their own deep and central space in the topography of her body. In keeping with the optical properties of the burning glass, the emphasis of the scene shifts from what Sam sees at the wall to what she feels there, from the reflected imagery of the Washington Monument and the American flag to the violent sensations of birth.[43] Such sensations, of course, can never be seen or verified in a flat mirror; a specular regime might thus consign them to insignificance, illegitimacy, or outright nonexistence ("false labor"). Mason, however, emphasizes their presence and consuming force: they are "strong," "massive," "overpowering," "like a tornado moving in [Sam]" (240). With the image of the tornado Mason folds yet another turbulent vortex into the scene, to take its place alongside the female loins through which the storm rages, the burning glass that incites those loins, and the sexual morphology mimicked by that glass in the first place. As concavity upon concavity thus conspires to evoke the generative potential of the female body as a matrix of war, the novel's title begins to reverberate in a most provocative way. The alternative optics of the burning glass work to lead Sam, as it were, "in cunt-ry"—not, however, toward her lack as a female or a civilian but toward her direct bodily involvement in the war system, an involvement no less material, tangible, or real than that of the soldier male. This collapse of the defining opposition between soldiers and civilians is further signaled by Emmett's response to the memorial in the novel's final paragraph. As he "stud[ies] the names low on a panel," his face suddenly "bursts into a smile like flames" (245), as if Lin's burning glass has ignited, or perhaps rekindled, a sense of responsibility for the war in him as well as in Sam. In this annealing fire, the veteran merges with his civilian counterpart. The optics of the memorial reveals them to be full and equal partners in the apparatus that made Vietnam possible.

The political implications of this moment should not be overlooked. The earlier scene that places Dwayne's photographic image, forever frozen in youth, within the specular framework of the flat mirror is probably the closest *In Country* comes to conflating the soldier-citizen and the necro citizen. There, for one of the few times in the novel, the figure of the veteran—a veteran, moreover, whom Sam elsewhere envisions as ground meat—assumes a disembodied, spectral cast, and within the planar field of his blank gaze Sam's own difference and putative deficiency take on a stubbornly material aspect. Later, at the wall, it is Dwayne's name, and not his visage, that stares out from the reflective black granite; the effect is to discorporate the soldier figure all the more, to shift his material specificity toward what the example of "SAM A HUGHES" has already shown to be an eerily fungible form of personhood. As evidenced by Emmett's and Sam's convergent experiences

of burning awareness, the nonmimetic optics of the memorial edge veteran and civilian alike toward a more expansive mode of national belonging than either necro or soldier-citizenship. Unlike the former, this alternative model of civic identity is fully embodied. Unlike the latter, it is nonhierarchical. Unlike either, it can ultimately make room for Sam.

Certainly a Sam Hughes racked with labor pains in front of a war memorial is on some level a distortion, since the novel offers no corroborating evidence that Sam is actually pregnant at this time. It is just the type of distortion, however, that Irigaray teaches us to expect from the concave mirror, a liberating anamorphosis that allows Sam to recognize a vital truth about herself and her war experience. For all its apparent anticlimax in the narrative, then, going to the wall is a watershed moment for Sam. At Cawood's Pond she has already experienced a phenomenological approximation of battle. At the memorial, there is a further expansion of awareness, from the phenomenology of combat toward the ideology of militarization, from the personal to the political, as Sam comes to see and feel what the difficult embodiment of feminine sexuality and maternity *means* in a war culture. More than combat's rough equivalent, it is combat's material and ideological precondition acting in league with other militarizing forces to make armed violence conceivable. Sam's labor pangs thus gloss the Gnostic riddle cited by Nancy Huston: "How long will men make war?—As long as women have children" (qtd. in "Matrix" 119); having children is perhaps the most common way, though hardly the only one, in which civilian women like Sam help make war. While Sam's contractions may be false in a clinical sense, then, they prove true enough in other more profound ways. Not only do they mimic the convulsions of a nation rocked to its foundations by bitter war; they also signal the ideologically engineered sympathy between the female reproductive system and the war system. From the shadow of a war memorial, the uterus speaks, implicating itself as a war machine.[44]

Strange Power of Speech

"You Are an American, Your Voice Can Make the Difference," reads a poster that catches Sam's eye at the wall in Washington (244). The memorial extends a similarly empowering invitation to its viewers. By situating them as veterans and casualties of Vietnam, it offers them access to the discursive authority that soldiers marked by war have long enjoyed and still routinely claim.[45] The wall thus opens up the familiar discursive category of "war veteran" to new and perhaps unorthodox voices. But in Mason's imaginative account, it actively promotes alternative categories as well, opening up spaces for new kinds of Vietnam stories and new subject positions from which to tell them. In eliciting Sam's birth pangs, for instance, Mason's version of the memo-

rial all but insists that the ever-widening national dialogue on Vietnam must make room for the war's American *progenitors* as well as its veteran progeny. To have given birth to the wall and its many names, Vietnam and its many dead, is after all to bear responsibility for them. This responsibility includes an obligation to bear witness, and to bear witness not merely as those who have shared in war's suffering but as those who have helped to inflict it. Alongside the veterans, then, are the overlapping but nonidentical ranks of the militarized, with their own need and right to speak.

That the perpetrators as well as the victims of violence must claim a subject position in order to proceed with the work of collective understanding, mourning, and healing is also the point of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which pops into Sam's head during her Cawood's Pond mission. "She recalled the poem from school about the man who had to wear a dead albatross around his neck. The man in the poem was sorry he had shot the albatross, and he went around telling everybody at a wedding about it, like a pregnant woman thrusting her condition on everyone" (215). The immediate context for this exercise in cultural literacy is Sam's growing frustration with Emmett over his inability to put the war behind him and get on with his life: the veteran's stymied existence evokes the Mariner's. The poem's defining image further clarifies this connection: to Sam, Vietnam is Emmett's albatross, the burden he cannot stop reliving and compulsively forcing on everyone around him. Sam thus reads the narrative impulse behind the Mariner's riveting tale of murder, guilt, and penance primarily as a pathological symptom rather than as a potential source of insight or therapeutic value.[46]

The subsequent trip to Washington, however, alters the significance and scheme of Coleridge's poem as a Vietnam allegory. By implicating its viewers in the war's violence and destruction, the Vietnam Memorial aligns *them*, and the national community they represent, with Coleridge's Mariner, hanging the crime of Vietnam on the United States itself. That crime is given objective form in the 58,000 names on Maya Lin's unseemly wall. These dead veterans are *America's* collective albatross, a symbol of national guilt, and any national expiation for their deaths must, as in Coleridge's poem, proceed through confession and witness. Alongside his complicity in the death of another living creature, the Mariner discovers his obligation to share his dearly won sense of moral responsibility with others. As part of his penance, he burns with a "woeful agony" that can only be eased by recounting his story, and his "strange power of speech" rivets his listeners (see Coleridge 578–590). Inasmuch as these listeners become storytellers in turn, the narrative circle slowly forming around the dead albatross will continue to widen, dramatizing the poem's central themes of community and responsibility.

Coleridge's Wedding Guest comes away from his encounter with the Mariner much as many an American has come away from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial:

> He went like one that hath been stunned,
> And is of sense forlorn:
> A sadder and a wiser man,
> He rose the morrow morn. (622–625)

Such feelings would not be lost on Sam, so chastened and awestruck at novel's end. But the memorial's ultimate objective is not so much to reduce its viewers to the stunned silence of the Wedding Guest as to endow them with the narrative power and purpose of the Mariner, a power that Sam not incidentally compares to the discursive authority of a pregnant woman sharing *her* burden with everyone within earshot. In awakening Americans to their complicity in Vietnam, the memorial challenges them to test their own strange powers of speech in an emerging national conversation on the war. The Coleridge material helps Mason accentuate the democratizing effect of this challenge.

In one of the epigraphs to this chapter, Maya Lin voices the conviction that led her, as a twenty-one-year-old noncombatant, to speak in earth and stone about the Vietnam War: "I don't think you have to live through a trauma to understand it." Even as it claims imaginative access to Vietnam for all Americans, however, Lin's remark continues to distance noncombatants from the "trauma" of war in a way that once again works to the advantage of veterans, who have "live[d] through" what civilians can only hope to "understand." Lin, that is, cannot challenge the authority of soldier-citizens without inadvertently reproducing some of the very assumptions in which that authority is grounded. But if I have read Lin's memorial and Mason's novel correctly, both suggest that there is more than one way to live through a trauma. The most obvious, of course, is to be directly traumatized oneself: the way of veterans like Emmett, Tom, and Buddy Mangrum. Another way, however, is to underwrite the trauma, or to acquiesce to it: the way of the militarized, including those "noncontemporaneous with the event of war itself" (Hinrichsen 237). *In Country* stresses that both ways leave their marks in the flesh and fiber of the body. *Anyone* situated within the war system—anyone who has helped give birth to war—is blessed and cursed with a war story.[47] In different ways, and through different media, Mason and Lin seek to make that story burn so hot and bright in each of us that it will erupt into expression.[48]

"To tell a war story," observes Milton J. Bates, "is to surrender a precious part of oneself," because "once the story is told, it becomes partly the property of another" (218). This is exactly why such stories *must* be told. Beyond

simply acknowledging our right to a seat at the table where war is discussed, we must exercise that right, for there are many who need to hear us, who even now persist in the fantasy that they are somehow beyond the pale of war or exempt from responsibility for it. Our voices *can* make a difference.[49] *In Country* witnesses to this truth. By attacking the military stranglehold over war discourse, the novel confers upon its noncombatant protagonist *and* readership the right to claim a space in that discourse, a precious and timely gift to receive from a book that holds so many other rewards as well. Sam Hughes's story of war and the body, war *on* the body, is ultimately a clarion call to all Americans to find and articulate their own.

Overreading (for) the Body

Walker Percy's Cautionary Tale

In the place of Lancelot we have Judge Schreber.
—Michel Foucault

This book began with a rousing call for a body-oriented, materially grounded approach to the too-often idealized and over-intellectualized field of southern literary studies. The next six chapters, drawing on roughly a century of southern writing, mapped out an eclectic series of readings built on such an approach. For this concluding chapter, however, I will shift my focus to consider a text that itself explicitly foregrounds the critical practice of reading (for) the body that I have advocated here—foregrounds it, moreover, with a skepticism that borders on disdain. That text is Walker Percy's brilliant, angry, provocative 1977 novel, *Lancelot*. In a contemporaneous interview, Percy described his novel as "a kind of cautionary tale" (W. Delaney 154), but I mean to approach it here as a different sort of fable, an implicit warning to body-oriented critics about the epistemological and moral limitations of their reading practice. Indeed, in Percy's narrator and antihero, Lancelot Andrewes Lamar, they will meet their own ironic doppelganger, a meticulous, inveterate observer whose attentions to the body become so voyeuristic and paranoid as to generate misreading after misreading, in a downward spiral of violence and ruin. Along the way, the novel revisits situations and questions encountered in earlier sections of this study. Lancelot, for instance, formulates an ethical system around the body in a manner reminiscent of Elaine Scarry, though with results far less benign, and he, like Scarry, reflects on the special authority and certainty carried by physical pain. He becomes engrossed in questions of identity and blood that, as in Faulkner's *Light in August*, inevitably take on a racial dimension. He rushes to collapse statistical probability into airtight scientific fact as fervently as Francis Galton or Pudd'nhead Wilson. He grapples with some of the same uncanny phenomena of electronic presence—the discorporated voices and displaced subjec-

tivities—that preoccupied Hurston in chapter 2, though with far less insight into their implications as technologically mediated effects. He even offers his own version of the manual discourse that troubled Twain, musing aloud about the reliability with which intention can be assigned to the simple act of a handshake (Percy, *Lancelot* 74). *Lancelot*, then, brings my study full circle even as it urges the reader toward a bracing self-scrutiny.

Percy's narrative is a series of nine often rambling monologues delivered by the title character, an inmate at the "Center for Aberrant Behavior" in New Orleans (3), to his "priest-psychiatrist" (4) and childhood friend, Percival. The monologues begin on October 31, 1976, and continue until the November day when Lance is scheduled to be discharged from the institution. The story Lance unfolds, a story punctuated by digressions into Lamar family history, armchair philosophizing, and bitter tirades against contemporary America in the nation's bicentennial year, revolves around episodes from the autumn of the previous year, when the mind-numbing equilibrium of Lance's complacent middle age is shattered by a pair of events. First, a Hollywood film company descends on Lance's River Road plantation home, Belle Isle, to shoot a cliché-ridden B movie. Soon afterward, Lance stumbles across evidence that his wife, Margot, has been unfaithful to him and that their seven-year-old daughter, Siobhan, is actually the fruit of Margot's "carnal relations with another man" (15). The remainder of the novel traces Lance's efforts to get to the bottom of this and formulate an appropriate response. At stake is nothing less than his vision of life itself.

As a narrator, Lance is remarkably attuned to physical detail, as evidenced by the fine-grained body portraits with which he introduces nearly every character in his tale. Here, for example, is his rival, Robert Merlin: "He was lean and fit and old, muscular, thick-chested, heavy shock of yellowed gray hair curling over one eye. He had emphysema, I think: his neck ligaments held his chest up like a barrel. No sign of considerable age except the white hairs sprouting over the zipper of his jump suit and the white fiber around his blue iris" (47). Here is Margot on the afternoon she meets Lance for the first time: "Her face was shiny and foreshortened—was it the way she tilted her head back to push herself off the wall?—her mouth too wide. . . . Her neck was slender, round, and vulnerable but her back was strong and runneled. . . . I noticed that the freckles turned plum-colored in the damp and bruised skin under the eye" (74). There are equally vivid portraits of Siobhan (116–117); Margot's father, Tex (53); Lance's daughter Lucy (136); his first wife, also named Lucy (82–83); Lance's mother (214) and the man who may have been *her* lover, Harry Wills (213); the director Janos Jacoby (110) and the actress Raine Robinette (111); and Anna, a young rape survivor in the room next to Lance's at the Center for Aberrant Behavior (109). As alert to

body language, the nuance of gesture, attitude, and movement, as he is to specific physical features, Lance would appear to be, as a reader of and for the body, the complete package.[1]

Precisely this sort of seemingly mundane somatic detail inaugurates the great crisis of Lance's adult life. Late one afternoon, at five o'clock, which here as elsewhere in Percy's work epitomizes the everydayness that stultifies modern secular life, Lance's eyes fall randomly on a camp application that lists Siobhan's blood type as I-o (27). It is, of course, the most common of all blood types, the "universal donor" that may safely be given to anyone who needs blood. Yet "a worm of interest" inexplicably steals up Lance's spine, propelling him upstairs to rummage through his office for a document from his army days, which lists his own blood type: IV-AB (28). As he reviews some long-ago lesson in the genetics of blood type ("that when the genes or chromosomes split, the A goes one way, the B the other, but never the A and B together"), he reaches a shocking conclusion:

> Let Margot's gene equal X. My gene had to be A or B. Two equations were possible.
>
> X + A = o
> X + B = o
>
> The equations do not solve. X does not have a value. My blood type and Siobhan's blood type did not compute. (28–29)

Lance then reconstructs from old tax records that Margot was in Texas, at an actors workshop led by Merlin, for the four-week period in the summer of 1968 when Siobhan was most likely conceived. That summer, of course, was a time of great upheaval in American society, and when its full repercussions reach Lance seven years later, he compares his reaction to that of a scientist stumbling across evidence of cosmic upheaval on a photographic plate: "The astronomer sees a dot in the wrong place, makes a calculation, and infers the indisputable: comet on collision course, tidal waves, oceans rising, forests ablaze. The cuckold sees a single letter of the alphabet in the wrong place. From such insignificant evidence he can infer with at least as much certitude as the astronomer an equally incommensurate scene: his wife's thighs spread, a cry, not recognizably hers, escaping her lips" (20–21). From a single somatic sign, Lance arrives at a scenario of personal apocalypse.

The alphabetic algebra with which Lance attempts to ground identity in somatic minutiae—the A's, B's, and X's he uses to derive Siobhan's existence from another man's body—invites comparison with *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, whose title character, following the anachronistic example of Francis Galton, employs a similar strategy to give his fledgling science of personal identifi-

cation an aura of mathematical consistency and rigor. Lance also follows in Wilson's and Galton's footsteps in the easy way he takes statistical probabilities concerning the body and converts them into scientific certainties. Galton, we will recall from chapter 1, chose to ignore evidence from his own fingerprint archive that the pattern of an individual print had changed over time, because in his view the odds were so overwhelmingly against it. Wilson rules out a similar possibility on discovering an anomaly in *his* print collection. Here is Lance's version of this rhetorical move:

> [B]iology is not an exact science but a matter of averages and probabilities. So put July 15 at the summit of a probability curve and add or subtract two weeks in either direction along the x axis and, as I discovered later, the curve is so flat and close to the axis that breathing under it is difficult and conception damn near impossible.
>
> *A fact then*: Siobhan was fathered in Texas in July 1968, and not by me. (33; emphasis added)

Wilson and Galton, of course, were semioticians of skin, whereas Lance turns to blood as the physical index of identity in his daughter's case and fidelity in his wife's. He thus takes a path already traveled by the citizens of Faulkner's Jefferson, who also face a crisis of identity and meaning that they attempt to navigate by drawing on the bodily thematics of blood. In the Jim Crow world of *Light in August*, we recall, blood imagery takes on unavoidable racial overtones, peppering the discourse of Faulkner's white characters. Lance's late-century discourse of blood is similarly racialized. Ringing up a doctor cousin to verify his understanding of blood types, Lance lets him believe that the occasion is a "nigger paternity suit" rather than the state of his own marriage (29), prompting a crack from the cousin about the proverbial "nigger in the woodpile" (30). The uncomfortable banter may seem gratuitous, but in the association he creates between the sexual interloper in the House of Lamar and southern history's all-purpose black male scapegoat, Lance manages to tar his enemy with a very old brush.

Though Lance compares his revelation to a scientist's discovery of "the end of the world" (21), his awakening also marks a new beginning in his life.[2] "In the space of one evening," he observes, "I had made the two most important discoveries of my life. I discovered my wife's infidelity and five hours later I discovered my own life. I saw it and myself clearly for the first time" (51; cf. 107). What he sees is a daily itinerary so rote and soulless that the family servants have it timed down to the minute he leaves the supper table at night (52). The depth of his malaise is best suggested by another of his trademark body portraits. Excusing himself from the dining room, he slips into a darkened room to spy on Margot and the movie actors as they carry on in his absence, whereupon he is startled by a menacing, ape-like figure that

turns out to be his own image "in the dim pier mirror" of the parlor (64). Studying his reflection more carefully, he sees "a man gone to seed": "The cheek showed the razor track of the morning's shave; above it, the demarcated swatch of light fuzz on the knoll of the cheekbone. Capillaries were rising to the surface but had not yet turned into spiders. The nose was not broken, despite football and boxing, not red, blackheaded. The eyes showed a broken vessel and a blood spot like a fertile egg. There were grains in the lashes. The hair roots were not quite clean and were dandruff-flaked. The lips were cracked. The fingernails were black. The chin showed patches of beard missed by the razor" (65).

Lance's own body accuses him, confronting him with his abdication from his own existence. Margot's apparent betrayal pales beside the terrible self-betrayal evident here. Lance moves quickly to reconnoiter the damage. To test his strength and toughness, he puts his hand through the inch-thick walnut backboard of a plantation desk. "The knuckles were bleeding. The pain came through tentatively as if it were not sure it had permission. I thought: It has been a long time since I felt pain" (65). It is as if, in his desperation for some sign of life amid the haze of inauthenticity that enshrouds him, Lance reaches for the incontestable reality of Elaine Scarry's body in pain: his credo, suggests Lewis Lawson, should be "I hurt, therefore I am" (*Following* 234).[3] For Lance, then, to reenter and reclaim one's life is to pay redoubled attention to one's body.[4]

And to the bodies of others. Just before his eyes flick across the telltale camp application, Lance has been reading, "for perhaps the fourth or fifth time," a detective novel by Raymond Chandler (Percy, *Lancelot* 24).[5] His taste in literature hints at his all-consuming thirst for knowledge: "I had to be sure about Margot, about what she had done and was doing now. I had to be absolutely certain" (43). Worse than that: already "knowing the truth," he burns "to know more, prove more, *see*" (89). As Lance seeks this ocular proof, the narrative evolves into a detective story in its own right, proceeding through three main stages of discovery. First is the initial revelation of Siobhan's blood type, which launches the entire enterprise. Soon afterward, Lance commissions Elgin, a young man who works for the Lamars, to spy on Margot, Lucy, and the movie company at the nearby Holiday Inn, where the crew goes each evening to watch the daily rushes (97–102). With a scientist's rigor and detachment, the MIT senior tracks the movement of bodies across the Cartesian grid of the motel layout, and the results are suggestive but inconclusive: Margot pays unchaperoned visits to the rooms of both Merlin and Jacoby, and Lucy holes up for hours with Troy and Raine, a free-swinging couple from the film cast (124–125). But from his vantage point in the motel courtyard, Elgin can shed no light on what went on *behind* those closed doors. Lance thus remains ignorant of what he most wants to know.

This leads to stage three. By pulling a few strings, Lance convinces the motel manager to give notice to the actors (126–127). He then offers them lodging at Belle Isle, where Elgin installs a hidden, motion-activated video surveillance system in five of the bedrooms (141–145). Lance is counting on Elgin's technical wizardry to give him access to a closed-door realm of bodies in motion: "That was what I wanted. Who moved, toward whom, with whom" (145). Once again, however, there are difficulties. The tapes are somehow corrupted—a problem we will return to later. For now it is enough to note that each stage of Lance's detective work is an exercise in reading (for) the body, assigning ethical import to somatic data. Stage one: the presence or absence of blood antigens, the disposition of human chromosomes. Stage two: the movement of bodies through public space. Stage three: the interplay among bodies in private space.

As the detective plot thickens, Lance becomes increasingly hard-boiled in his dealings with others. As if emulating Chandler's Philip Marlowe, he retreats into a cynical, emotionally guarded posture that reduces the people in his life to abstractions, objects, organs. He masks his fear of sexual betrayal with the detached curiosity and antiseptic language of the clinical observer: "Why is it such an unspeakable thing for one creature to obtrude a small portion of its body into the body of another creature? . . . As a physician, wouldn't you say that nothing more is involved than the touch of one membrane against another? Cells touching cells" (16–17). Men and, especially, women are reduced to crude genital synecdoches: pricks, pussies, cunts, "pricks after pussy, pricks after pricks, pussy after pussy. But most of all pussy after pricks" (177). And Lance also turns this anatomizing discourse upon himself: on the first morning of his newly vigilant life, a fly alights on his wrist at the breakfast table, "touch[ing] a hair," "crawling under it, everting and scrubbing his wings. As he did so, he moved the hair. The hair moved its root which moved a nerve which sent a message to my brain. I felt a tickle" (88–89).[6] The moment offers him a way to twist the question of his "feelings" into a tactile and neurological matter rather than an emotional one: "her fornication, anyone's fornication, amounts to no more than molecules encountering molecules and little bursts of electrons along tiny nerves—no different in kind from that housefly scrubbing his wings under my hair" (89). The human motive behind this dehumanizing rhetoric is clear: it is an effort to minimize the hurt and doubt that have erupted into Lance's life. But in equating persons with bodies, and bodies with loose aggregates of molecules, cells, tissues, and stimulus-response pathways, Lance is also subtly distancing them from the human consideration that is every person's birthright, and in this ethical gap lie the seeds of violence (cf. Pearson 63). There is a malignant method in Lance's representational madness.

That violence is already latent in the epistemological thrust of Lance's mission. More than once, he invokes biblical precedent to link knowledge with the aggressive, invasive force of masculine sexuality: "If Merlin 'knew' my wife, I had to know his knowing her" (90); "The Jews called it knowing and now I knew why. Every time I went deeper I knew her better" (236). His lust for knowledge is equally intrusive and manipulative when he attempts the "scientific" study of his subjects, moving them around like laboratory mice, violating both their privacy and their trust. If, as Jac Tharpe observes, Lance "conclude[s] that the sexual act is violence" (*Walker Percy* 93), Percy's corollary is that, as performed by his protagonist, the knowledge act is too. The conjunction between knowledge and power also informs Lance's efforts as moviemaker, as the mastermind behind the surveillance tapes. The intrinsic force of the camera saturates the language of film; the director's work, like the hunter's, consists in tracking and shooting his subjects. Visual observation becomes another form of violence.

Not long after recounting the birth of his moviemaking ambitions, Lance makes a revelation that takes the detective plot into deeper, darker territory. His quest, he explains, is not only epistemological but spiritual, a metaphysical project on the grand scale:

> In times like these when everyone is wonderful, what is needed is a quest for evil. . . . Such a quest serves God's cause! How? Because the Good proves nothing. When everyone is wonderful, nobody bothers with God. . . . But suppose you could show me one "sin," one pure act of malevolence. . . . That would bring matters to a screeching halt. . . . "Evil" is surely the clue to this age, the only quest appropriate to the age. For everything and everyone's either wonderful or sick and nothing is evil. . . .
>
> My quest was for a true sin—was there such a thing? (138, 140)

Building on the Arthurian resonance of his name (and Percival's), Lancelot adds to his growing résumé: sleuth, scientist, director, and now knight-errant ("of the Unholy Grail"; 138) and philosopher, plumbing the depths of ultimate reality. From this point his epistemological and metaphysical quests race along in tandem, raising the stakes and the tension of the novel exponentially.

Both quests converge on the sexual act. For the epistemologist and detective (and aggrieved husband), it represents the most authentic form of knowledge, the one sure answer to the question of marital fidelity. But as Lance explains, the metaphysician has his own special investment in sexuality and its unique place among human experiences: "Evil, sin, if it exists, must be incommensurate with anything else. . . . There is only one kind of behavior which is incommensurate with anything whatever, in both its infinite

good and its infinite evil. That is sexual behavior. The orgasm is the only earthly infinity. Therefore it is either an infinite good or an infinite evil" (140). Lance's conceptual sleight of hand thus effects a complete somatization of the most urgent and intricate spiritual matters.[7] Now, not just the integrity of his own house but the nature of good and evil rests on his wife's sexual loyalty.

It is a characteristic move. Throughout the novel, Lance renders spirituality indistinguishable from the body by sacralizing sexuality and sexualizing the sacred.[8] Asked whether he loves his wife, he professes ignorance "about such large subjects" (89), observing instead that "[t]here was a time just before and after we were married when I could not not touch her." When Percival presses him on the matter, he again deflects the issue from love to sexual pleasure. "Your saints say, Yes, but the love of God is even better, but Jesus how could this be so? . . . Doesn't your own Jewish Bible say there is nothing under the sun like the way of a man with a maid?" (122). Margot is Lance's religion, her body the anchor of what spiritual life he possesses. "Things she owned were like saints' relics," he recalls (170). "The place where she lived . . . became a shrine." And cunnilingus becomes an eroticized version of the Eucharist (171). And when Lance isn't busy apotheosizing sex, he demonizes it with equal fervor, blaming it for America's evils. "Washington, the country," he complains, "is down the drain" (220), and in his rogues gallery of those responsible for its downfall, political corruption, religious hypocrisy, and organized crime yield pride of place to sexual indiscretions: "pornographers . . . buggers . . . dirty books, dirty movies, dirty plays, dirty talk shows, dirty soap operas, fags, lesbians, abortionists . . . courses in how to fuck for schoolchildren." "The Jews in the Old Testament knew the secret," he continues, "that man is conceived in sin" (224). The sexual carries its own intrinsic spiritual stain.

As the novel nears its climax, a hurricane drifts northward toward Belle Isle from the gulf. Lance convinces Elgin and his parents, Tex and Siobhan, Lucy and Merlin to evacuate, leaving only Margot, Jacoby, Troy, Raine, and himself to ride out the stormy night. Descending to the cellar, he uncaps a natural gas well that has been sealed off for many years and pipes the odorless methane directly into the house's air conditioning system (228–229). Climbing the stairs to the bedrooms with a bowie knife at the ready in the pocket of his hunting coat, he completes his metamorphosis from movie director to stalker of prey.

The combined effects of low atmospheric pressure from the storm's howling winds, the methane gas squeezing the oxygen from the house's air, and the recreational drug that Raine shares with Lance lend a surreal sheen to subsequent events. Proceeding to the master bedroom, he confronts his worst nightmare—Margot and Jacoby in his ancestral bed—as the novel arrives

at its heart of darkness. Here Lance's confusion of the spiritual and the sexual becomes truly apocalyptic. The great bed looms "like a cathedral, a Gothic bed, posts as thick as trees, carved and fluted and tapering to spires and gargoyles above the canopy," its headboard "massive and complex as an altar screen," its "posts and rails like flying buttresses" (237). Kneeling at its "openwork panel" (238), he compares himself to "an unconsecrated priest hearing an impatient confession," but the voice he hears "in a prayer-like intonation" offers only the "divinity-obscenity" of sexual pleasure, and to evoke the sight he beholds as his eyes adjust to the darkness, he shifts from an ecclesiastical register to a diabolical one: "Now I could see it, the strangest of all beasts, two-backed and pied, light-skinned dark-skinned, striving against itself, holding discourse with itself in prayers and curses" (239). This beast owes as much to Revelation as it does to Shakespeare: not just Iago's sexual monstrosity but a kind of Antichrist in its travesty of religious ritual and the holy space of the bed (cf. Lawson, *Following* 207). Again, the element of depersonalization is a stepping-stone to violence: Lance reveals his presence to the heaving lovers, then slits Jacoby's throat with the bowie knife (Percy, *Lancelot* 242–243). A hallucinatory exchange with Margot follows, during which Lance attempts to light a kerosene lamp, setting off the methane (246). The explosion blows him clear of the house, the only survivor of the conflagration.

The beast in the bedroom seemingly answers Lance's definition of evil as sexual sin. Reviewing the tragedy from his hospital cell, however, he feels that his metaphysical quest has failed, generated no insight into good and evil or the existence of God, only a banal sense of anticlimax. Even as he had slayed Jacoby—the knight vanquishing his foe, the hunter taking down his quarry, the movie director eliminating his rival—he awaited an adequate revelation or emotion "to match the deed. . . . I remember casting about for the feeling and not finding one" (242). "There was no 'secret' after all," he continues, "no discovery, no flickering of interest, nothing at all, not even any evil. There was no sense of coming closer to the 'answer'" (253). This agonizing mystery—"Why did I discover nothing at the heart of evil?"—propels Lance on a third quest: the attempt, through the act of narration, to understand why the previous year's searches yielded only disaster. This, we learn, is his reason for breaking a year-long silence and talking to Percival. "I think I see now what I am doing. I am reliving with you my quest. That's the only way I can bear to think about it. If you listen I think I can figure out what it was" (137).

The extent to which Lance ever pinpoints his shortcomings as a scientist and metaphysician is debatable. As he prepares to leave the hospital to start a new life with Siobhan—and, he hopes, with his neighbor Anna—he still sounds bitter, uncertain, and not entirely repentant. A reader seek-

ing reason for his failure, however, might point to his refusal to acknowledge the *instability* of the bodily signifiers upon which, as detective and philosopher, he leans so heavily. Like Pudd'nhead Wilson, like Francis Galton, like Percy Grimm, he craves an unequivocal bodily index of identity and value. But Lance should know better—in fact does know better. His own hands are living proof that somatic signs are no different from other signifiers in their ability to lie. Those hands, we learned early on, were burned in the tragedy of Belle Isle. The newspapers weave a lurid but also sentimental story around Lance's wounds, a tale of courage and loyalty in the face of bereavement: "SCION OF OLD FAMILY CRAZED BY GRIEF. SUFFERS BURNS TRYING TO SAVE WIFE" (13); "RESTRAINED FROM ENTERING HOUSE. HANDS BURNED" (60). Lance allows this generous reading to stand for most of the novel before revealing, only pages from the end, his true reason for reentering the burning ruins: to retrieve the incriminating hunting knife with which he murdered Janos Jacoby (246). The novel's most ardent disciple of reading (for) the body is thus not above capitalizing on the body's *mis*readability.

So desperate is Lance's hunger for certainty, however, that he forgets this lesson in the semiotic slipperiness of the body. We have already seen him straighten the curve of probability regarding Siobhan's conception into a flat line of accusation pointed directly at Margot. With equal rigidity, he defines women solely in terms of their sexual function, then sorts them according to how and where they perform it: into "virtuous women who are proud of their virtue" and confine sex to marriage, and "women of the street who are there to be fucked" (178). Margot offers a succinct diagnosis of Lance's binary thinking in her final, methane-addled exchange with him: "With you I had to be either—or—but never a—uh—woman" (245). Surely the missing terms are "lady" and "whore." The destructive effects of such thinking are underscored by Margot's spectacular death just seconds later.

In addition to his general overreliance on the body for epistemological purposes, Lance's attempt to derive a specifically sexual foundation for evil has two critical consequences. First, his insistence on sexualizing the basis of all human relations (his "GREAT SECRET OF LIFE"; 224) and on demonizing the phenomenon of sexuality itself prevents him from recognizing the beauty and strangeness of other beings and the mystery of the human condition—a mystery that includes sexuality as a far richer and more complex domain than Lance's binary scheme of infinite good–infinite evil can allow for. Nowhere is this deficiency of vision more evident than in Lance's account of the surveillance tapes. He reads their distortions as pure grotesquerie, a carnival of warped, oozing bodies whose outward irregularities signal inner depravity—a Dantean underworld where flames leap from the heads of the damned (186) and sexual sinners drift through limbo, "blown in an electronic

wind" (185).[9] Critics have generally followed Lance's lead, reading the bodily deformities of the video images as a window onto the moral depravity of the subjects. "Creatures of darkness," Lewis A. Lawson has called them (*Following* 217). "[C]arnal, predatory beasts," writes Maria Montello (53). "[N]onselves moving through a surreal dark-as-light netherworld," suggests John Desmond (168).

But other aspects of the scene invite a more generous reading of the actors in Lance's movie. As Elgin explains to Lance, the video images are "nothing but electrons" (Percy, *Lancelot* 181), elemental, energy-emitting matter. This, coupled with the flame-like nimbus that surrounds several of the figures, hints at the intense energy, the raw heat of the activity Lance witnesses. Lance reads this energy as demonic, the heat of lust and sin, when it could be viewed as Bataillean radiance, the heat of beings living passionately, burning bright with vitality and mystery, endowed with their own glory and fire. We see this radiance directly in the "negative effect" that reverses light and dark on the tapes. Thanks to this effect, the naked white flesh of Margot and the other subjects shows up as dark—undressing means "shedding light clothes for dark skin" (190)—allowing Lance once again to racialize what he sees as sexual deviance. But the same effect that exposes such outward darkness reveals an interior glow: "mouths opened on light, eyes were white sockets" (185). Lance returns to this mysterious effulgence over and over, unsure what to make of it: "When they talked, their mouths opened on light" (186); "They do not speak but their mouths and eyes open on light" (190); "Her eyes close on light, but her mouth opens letting out light" (190). And little wonder: the suggestion that the corruptible body harbors a still-luminous spiritual core is at odds with Lance's need to vilify the figures on the tapes.

A similar critique might be leveled at Lance's disgust for the mergings of the onscreen images produced by the video distortion. He recoils from the permeability of the bodies coupling and uncoupling, swelling and streaming, before him, as if their inability to maintain discrete physical boundaries signals moral laxity. But the porous ebb and flow of the onscreen figures also expresses a deep truth of the human condition, one that Lance, battened down in a Cartesian realm of video control rooms, *pigeonniers*, and hospital cells—the cramped, monadic spaces of a solitary, transcending ego—is not equipped to understand.[10] In his philosophical essays, Percy, building on the work of Charles Sanders Peirce and Gabriel Marcel, argues that human existence is fundamentally intersubjective, that subjects achieve consciousness and experience being in reciprocal exchange with other subjects.[11] The human condition, for Percy, is not boundedness of body or consciousness but porosity, interpenetration, motion. *Inter*subjectivity demands that the self rupture its borders. Sexuality, love, and sign use are key elements of this humanizing process, this openness to otherness that Lance can only deni-

grate as alien and amoeboid. Far from corroborating his darkening view of things, then, the tapes work to challenge that view. Their eerie, discorporated voices, so difficult to assign to individual sources, and their viscous, dissolving forms reintroduce us to the uncanny phenomenology of electronic presence we encountered in chapter 2, along with the new forms of subjectivity-out-of-place mediated by turn-of-the-century storage technologies such as phonography and film—technologies that themselves merge in Lance's high-tech audiovisual recording equipment. Ensconced in the older modernity of the liberal subject, Lance is too threatened by this decentered version of selfhood to see it as a source of insight into human existence in its interpersonal dimensions—or to see the tapes as anything other than pornographic abominations.[12]

Lance's heavy-handed sexualization of evil also allows him *not* to recognize, in his own violence and rage, the "one pure act of malevolence" he has sought in his quest for the Unholy Grail.[13] This evasiveness dominates the novel's climax, when Lance surprises Margot and Jacoby in bed. By bestializing their lovemaking (239–240), he deflects attention from his own murderous intent, using *their* sex to mask *his* violence as the scene's true center of evil.[14] And when the moment of real bestiality—Lance's savage slaughter of Jacoby—arrives, his narration reverts to the chilly language of clinical observation he has used elsewhere to dehumanize his enemies. The knife at Jacoby's throat? "All it came down to was steel molecules entering skin molecules, artery molecules, blood cells" (254). The director's dying breaths? "[W]arm air . . . blowing the hairs on the back of my hand" (243), no different from the fly that once crawled along Lance's wrist. To talk this way about cold-blooded murder is to evacuate its moral horror. That horror Lance reserves for the beast on the bed.

But Percy doesn't let him off that easily. His protagonist's self-righteous rhetoric undermines itself and implicates him in the evil he seeks. Lance insists, for example, that his rallying cries for "a new order of things" (156) are not be confused with the slogans of the Ku Klux Klan ("those poor ignorant bastards") or the Nazis ("What stupidity!"). He dismisses Hitler as "a madman" (138). Yet his habit of racializing his enemies is all too reminiscent of the groups he claims to abhor. And how much moral distance from Hitler can a man claim when he, too, gases his foes and turns his house into an oven, engineering a holocaust in his own land? Lance's own words and deeds place him in league with some of Western culture's most infamous figures: the Nazis, the Klan, even "Lucifer blown out of hell" (246)—a veritable axis of evil.

Ironically, that evil does have its peculiar somatic signature, just as Lance thought it would. Not, however, in the infinity of orgasm, but in a different sensation he feels on the night of the killings and ever since.

> You know the feeling of numbness and coldness, no, not a feeling, but a lack of feeling, that I spoke of during the events at Belle Isle? I told you it might have been the effect of the hurricane, the low pressure, methane, whatever. But I still feel it. . . . I feel so cold, Percival.
>
> Tell me the truth. Is everyone cold now or is it only I? (253)

This icy condition originates in the "cold numbing sensation" that "spread[s] from the pit of [Lance's] stomach" after he sends everyone away from Belle Isle but his intended victims (206). More than any other, this act—the methodical sorting out of human beings into survivors and the doomed—marks Lance's commitment to a course of evil. It is a point of no return, the numbness and cold its special stigmata, which Lance still bears on the morning of his release. Those stigmata present their own critique of Lance's intellectual gestures toward materialism, the ease with which he boils down human phenomena to the movement of molecules. Numbing cold, after all, is precisely the *lack* of such molecular motion. Lance's own physical sensations contradict his assumption that the heart of evil lies in the heat of sexual passion. He was not exactly wrong to look to the body in his search for sin. But he looked in the wrong place, at the wrong bodies.

The novel's conclusion finds Lance in an uneasy holding pattern, suspended between a disastrously inadequate reading practice and the lack of a clear alternative. Convinced that his quest for the Unholy Grail led nowhere even as he shivers with the vestigial effects of his sin, he ends the novel waiting for a sign—not of sin this time but of God's existence and justice—leaving the reader to wonder whether, benumbed and skeptical as he is, Lance would even recognize such a sign if he saw it. Perhaps the new posture of waiting for his grail—with its elements of openness, receptivity, patience—rather than charging headlong after it in a personal crusade will make the difference this time.

In fact, Lance's sign may already stand before him, in the figure of his listening friend. No sooner has Lance announced his demand for evidence of divine will than the priest-physician begins to speak out loud, his words registered directly in the narrative for the first time (256). Earlier comments by Percival have registered in subtler ways, influencing the course and focus of Lance's monologue. It is Percival, for example, who presses Lance to talk about love rather than sex, and about feelings rather than physical sensations.[15] Now, however, we can read the words themselves for the soft but insistent rejoinder they offer to Lance's American jeremiads.[16] Percival dares to voice affirmation; twelve of the thirteen lines he utters consist of the single word "Yes." That word is also the final word in the novel.

More important than any particular thing Percival says is the fact of his saying it. Percival's emergence into voice, which signals an interior transfor-

mation, a new spirit of commitment, is also a breakthrough for Lancelot. For Lance's monologues are simply the latest of the solipsistic formations he fashions to serve his fetish for order and control: self-erected prison-houses of language, the verbal equivalent of the cellular enclosure Lance occupies in space. Percival's short, forceful statements chisel away at the walls of this prison. Erupting into the text seemingly out of nowhere, they interrupt and interleaven Lance's monologue with otherness, pushing novel and narrator alike toward the expansive domain of dialogue, in a self-perpetuating process extending beyond the bounds of the text. "Is there anything you wish to tell me before I leave?" Lance asks, to which Percival replies, "*Yes*" (257). The novel may have ended, but the conversation has not. Lance has already testified to the power of this dialogue. "I have the feeling," he tells Percival, "that while I was talking and changing, you were listening and changing" (254).[17] Perhaps the tables are about to turn.

What lessons can we take from Percy's cautionary tale? Throughout this book, the methodology of reading (for) the body has helped uncover the oppression and suffering still endemic to the U.S. South long after the demise of its most visible evil, institutionalized slavery. It has taken us to the heart of southern, and U.S., power relations—to the workings of wealth, status, and influence as they are organized, legitimated, reproduced, and occasionally resisted in the region—and to the fault lines in those relations that reveal them to be contingent and provisional rather than necessary and natural. In this way, a body-oriented criticism becomes a powerful advocate and respecter of persons, especially of those who lack access to self-representation or are denied sovereignty over their bodies. Reading (for) the body demands that we read *beyond* it as well: to recognize the pain, restore the social visibility, recover the history, record the voices, and register the contributions of subjects othered *by* their history but never other *to* it.

In *Lancelot*, however, reading (for) the body does not unmask injustice so much as create it, since Lance uses it to justify terrible violence and abuse. It is not enough to note that his version of this reading practice is radical. What is needed is to understand exactly what's so radical about it: the way Lance so single-mindedly reads (for) the body *only*, or reads beyond it only to break it down into strictly material elements—organs, cells, molecules—rather than reading through it for its human dimension and story. In his hands it becomes a strategy not for respecting and recovering persons but for objectifying them.

What put Percy in a position to notice, and diagnose, these troubling symptoms of the modern condition? I side with the many scholars who would locate one important answer to that question in Percy's medical training. Percy had received his medical degree from Columbia University's Col-

lege of Physicians and Surgeons when he contracted tuberculosis from a pathology lab cadaver and spent two years convalescing in a New York sanitarium, an ordeal that redirected his sense of vocation away from medicine and toward philosophy and fiction. But from the vicissitudes of his training he would have learned that, as Richard Martínez observes, "modern medicine concerns itself with diseases rather than persons," so that "professional responsibility" is too often "limited to the role of diagnosing and fixing the mechanical failure of [the] body" (89).[18] Thus, doctors must be on guard against reducing their patients to specimens or cases, or conflating them with the organ or region of the body affected ("I have a liver coming in this afternoon"). Critic Laurie Zoloth's alternative view of medicine, however, exhibits an expansive sense of possibilities for the profession that I believe Percy shared. "[T]he moral act of medicine," she writes, is a form of reading (for) the body, but it is also more, a "reading of the text of the body *and* the heart of the other, the highest stakes read of all" (97; emphasis added). As such, it "rests on the possibility of becoming the other, of the reversal and doubling that all moral life demands: now I am you, seeing the world with these eyes, and now you are one of us" (97). As *Lancelot* ends, Lance is on the verge of just this sort of humanizing reversal. Whether he ever comes to occupy the moral territory mapped by Zoloth must remain a matter of speculation, but what seems beyond debate is that his friend the priest-physician has blazed a trail for him, should he choose to follow.

Is it merely a coincidence that of the two characters the superior reader, and the more ethically exemplary figure, is the man trained as a doctor? "The heart of medicine," writes Robert Coles, "is how one person communicates with another" (14). It was precisely Zoloth's kind of reading, oriented toward the body but ultimately not limited to it, that Percy valued most highly about his own medical training: making rounds, talking to patients, listening closely to them (Tolson 157). As a reader of the body, Percy knew the epistemological constraints and ethical responsibilities attending that practice. And this, ultimately, is what distinguishes him from his character, that eager but misguided hermeneut of the body. For if we are never *not* our bodies, it is equally true that we are never *only* our bodies. Percy recognized both of these truths, Lance Lamar only the first one. For this reason it is finally the novelist's example rather than his grotesque protagonist's that we must take from literature out into a world where the incontestable reality of the body *and* the life-giving mystery of our fellow beings are waiting to press their claims upon us.

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Notes

Introduction. Recalcitrant Materialities

1. For more on the historical relationship between portraiture and photography in the "ceremonial presentation of the bourgeois *self*," see Sekula 6.

2. Henninger similarly refers to lynching postcards as the "flip side" of photographic images of "revered southern white female bodies" at beauty pageants, on plantation pilgrimages, "in front of Confederate monuments," and in other iconic spaces of the region's dominant visual order (41).

3. See also Brundage 37–38.

4. See not only Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire* but also, for example, her "Case," "Circum-Atlantic," "Flannery O'Connor," and "Poetics."

5. See Berlant, *Anatomy* 12–14, 216–217, and *The Queen* 4, 18, 59–60, 80, 199–200, 218; Castronovo 16–23; D. Nelson 38–46; Pease 3–5.

6. Compare Berlant's account of the "dead citizenship" forms that dominate contemporary U.S. political culture (*The Queen* 59–60).

7. More recently, Karla F. C. Holloway has demonstrated how the recalcitrant and public forms of embodiment attributed to women and to African Americans in the national imaginary leave members of these groups "with a compromised relationship" to a fundamental legal tenet of modern U.S. personhood, the right to privacy (*Private Bodies* 9). By contrast, Holloway notes, "the only bodies that have not consistently experienced the stigma of identity in this country . . . are those of heterosexual white males" (71), whose bodies have the ability to "disappear into the normative" (14) and avoid "hyperpublic notice" (15), which allows them to enjoy the legal presumption and civic entitlement of privacy.

8. Berlant has identified the discourse of this abstract America as a "National Symbolic" (*Anatomy* 5, 20–35).

9. As performance artist Coco Fusco notes, this tropicalizing process continues to operate in the contemporary global context: "As developed world societies become more and more associated with virtual disembodiment and electronic culture, it's the

cultures of the South that are associated more and more with physicality and sexuality" (qtd. in Weatherston 114).

10. For more on southwestern humor, see Cohen and Dillingham, Introduction; James Cox, "Humor"; Lynn; Romine, *Narrative* 24–64.

11. For an account of the octoroon figure as a "paradigm of creolized interculture" that directly challenges the "bipolar laws and customs" of Anglo America, including its "'law' of manifest destiny and . . . doctrine of monoculturalism," see Roach 182 (and, more generally, 179–186, 198–202, 211–237). Roach's attentiveness to "circum-Atlantic" modes of performance that complicate as they inform English and U.S. models of nation formation complements Ladd's interest in the mixed-race figure's implications for U.S. nationalism.

12. This figure would seem to anticipate Richard Wright's allegorical representation of "Queen Cotton" as a figure for the nineteenth- and twentieth-century U.S. South, though from Wright's African American perspective she appears cruel and mercurial. See *12 Million Black Voices* 38–39.

13. For representative examples, see Brinkmeyer, *Fourth Ghost*; Cash; Cobb, *Redefining*; Conkin; Connelly and Bellows; R. Davis, *Intellectual Life* and *Literature and Society*; Eagles; Faust, *Sacred Circle*; Fox-Genovese and Genovese; Genovese, *Southern Tradition* and *The World*; Ginés; R. Gray, *Writing*; Heilman; Hobson, *Tell*; Kreyling, *Inventing*; Murphy; M. O'Brien, *Conjectures*, *The Idea*, and *Rethinking*; Shapiro; Simpson, *Mind* and *Brazen Face*; Stephen Smith; A. Tate, "Southern Mode." And for more on Adams and the South, see M. O'Brien, *Henry Adams*.

14. On region and regional distinctiveness, see, for instance, J. Adams et al.; Brinkmeyer, *Remapping*; John Cox; T. Davis; Duck; R. Gray, *Southern Aberrations*; Griffin; Holman; Howard; Jones and Monteith; Amy Kaplan; Levander; José Limon; McKee and Trefzer; Lowe, "Calypso"; McPherson; M. O'Brien, *Henry Adams*; Peacock et al.; Powell; Richardson; Romine, *The Real South*; Silber; Smith and Cohn; Stecopoulus; Taylor; Whisnant, *All That*. On southern authorship and canonicity, see H. Baker, *Modernism*; Brantley; Hobson, *Southern Writer* and *Tell*; Humphries and Lowe; A. Jones, *Tomorrow* and "Work of Gender"; Kreyling, *Inventing*; Ladd, *Resisting*; Lewis; MacKethan, *Daughters*; Manning; Rubin, *Faraway Country*; Rubin et al.; Simpson, *Man*; A. Tate, "Profession"; L. Tate. On the plantation, see J. Adams; Bibler; Clinton, *Tara Revisited*; Fox-Genovese; Handley; Lewis; Loichot; Moss; Smith and Cohn; Woods. On slavery, the Civil War, and the Lost Cause, see Clinton and Silber; Diffley; Faust, *This Republic*; Foster; Hartman; Horwitz; Inscoe; McDowell and Rampersad; O'Dell; Patton; Sachsman et al.; E. Wilson; C. Wilson, *Baptized*; E. Young. On place, see Berry; M. Bone; D. Davidson; Ladd, "Dismantling"; Levy; Romine, "Where Is Southern Literature?"; Welty. On community, see C. Brooks; Romine, *Narrative*; Rubin, *Writer*. On family, see H. Baker, *I Don't Hate*; Falk; Franklin and Schweninger; Handley; Prince; Stephens; L. Wright; Wyatt-Brown, *Literary Percys*. On memory and history, see J. Adams; Byerman; Cohn; Fabre and O'Meally; R. Gray, *Literature*; Inscoe; R. King; Kreyling, *The South*; Ladd, *Resisting*; McPherson; O'Dell. On the environment, see Bullard; M. Dixon; Kirby, *Mockingbird* and *Poquosin*; I. Marshall; Rieger; Saikku; A. Wilson. On modernity and the region, see H. Baker, *Turning*; Benson; Gilroy; Hale; Ladd, *Resisting*; Ownby, *American*

Dreams; Roach; Whisnant, *Modernizing*. On whiteness and white supremacy, see Duvall, *Race*; Hale; T. Harris; Jenkins; Michaels; O'Dell; Schmidt; M. Smith; Stokes; Joel Williamson, *Rage*. On southern womanhood, see Carby, *Reconstructing*; Censer; Clinton, *Half Sisters* and *Plantation Mistress*; Feimster; Gwin; J. Hall; A. Jones, *Tomorrow*; F. King; Lewis; McMillen; A. Scott; Seidel; Turner. On class, see Carr; Cook; Costello; Godden and Crawford; McWhiney; Richardson; Stewart; Wray. On southern pastoral, see Bakker; Grammer; E. Harrison; MacKethan, *Dream*; Simpson, *Dispossessed*. On honor, see Ayers; Greenberg; Stowe 5–49; Wyatt-Brown, *Hearts* and *Southern Honor*. On religion and politics, see Brinkmeyer, *Three Catholic Writers*; C. Brooks; Caron; Ciuba, *Desire*; Coleman; Conkin; Haddox; Hobson, *But Now*; Hubbard; Ketchin; R. Nelson; O'Gorman; Ownby, *Subduing*; A. Tate, "Remarks"; C. Wilson, *Judgment* and *Flashes*. On southern ethnic cultures, see H. Baker, *Blues, The Journey*, and *Workings*; Bow; Cartwright, *Reading*; Evans; Ferris and Greenberg; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan*; Gussow; S. Jones, *Race Mixing*; Joyner; Levine; José Limon; Murray; Sobel; Sundquist, *Hammers* and *To Wake*; Trefzer.

15. For related studies of embodied racial stereotypes in and about the region that complement Roberts's work on gender, see Boskin; Carr; Cook; Foley; Hale 151–168; Lott, *Love*; Manring; McElya; Richardson; Wallace-Sanders; D. White 27–61; J. W. Williamson; Wray.

16. Indeed, for a critique precisely along these lines, expressing "discomfort with a vague theoretical 'body,'" see Castronovo 17–18. Adds Debra Walker King, "Much used phrases like *the body* and *the female body* prefigure a paradigmatic construction that emphasizes categorization of bodies, all bodies, as immutable and externally defined, though fundamentally similar" ("Introduction" ix). See also Armstrong 6–7.

Chapter One. Manual Discourse

Epigraphs are from Moenssens, *Fingerprint Techniques* 102; Dexter quoted in G. Nelson 38; Marx, *Capital* 1.772; Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* 52.

1. Citing historian Carlo Ginzburg, media theorist Friedrich Kittler has noted the modern emergence of new technologies of power, such as fingerprinting and criminology more generally, organized around "the gathering of traces that . . . optimize the control of bodies" (Kittler, *Literature* 93). Unlike Ginzburg, however, Kittler links the rise of these new technologies to the late nineteenth-century development of new media forms, such as phonography and film, that took over the function of information storage from writing. "With technological media," Kittler observes, "a knowledge assumes power that is no longer satisfied with the individual universals of its subjects . . . but instead registers distinguishing particulars" (*Gramophone* 83). It was of course in the identification of these "distinguishing particulars" that fingerprinting demonstrated its superiority to anthropometry. I will return to Kittler's work in more detail later in this chapter and the next.

2. Katherine Rowe notes the problematic epistemological status of the West story, which is still "transmitted by the FBI in the mode of folklore" (163), via a variety of media that cite "no source materials" for their accounts of the incident. Whether as authentic history or as elaborate foundation myth, however, the West case raises

issues concerning the body generally and the hand specifically that are at the heart of the discussion in this chapter.

3. It is a wager the criminal justice system continues to make on a daily basis: on August 10, 1999, the FBI unveiled its Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System, "a $640 million fingerprint system . . . expected to reduce the time it takes to identify suspects from months to hours" (Fields 1A).

4. Hartman suggests that "laboring hands" functioned as a "synecdoche for the self-possessed individual" in the postbellum United States (134). And Scarry observes that the hand in Marx's writings bears "some of the same primacy that phallus and womb have in the writings of Freud" (*The Body* 284).

5. Indeed, white southerners were also using black fingers as performative signifiers of racial difference during this period. Turn-of-the-century racial lynchings often involved the taking of "souvenirs" from the victim's body and their distribution among white participants and spectators. Such "souvenirs," which worked to proclaim and enforce racial difference by materializing, circulating, and perpetuating the memory of racial violence, included ears, parts of the genitals, and fingers. See J. Adams 88; Hale 213–215.

6. Indeed, the galvanizing effect of the address seems to have brought the hands of southerners into unusual visibility. *Up from Slavery* reports an outbreak of handshaking in the wake of Washington's speech: in addition to well-wishers congratulating Washington on an accomplished performance, the governor of Georgia and even President Grover Cleveland got into the act (see 225, 227–228, 241). A kind of chain reaction appeared to set in, handshake after handshake, as if Washington's vision of national reconciliation were being realized in and through the very imagery in which he framed it ("one as the hand"), in a massive, spontaneous, contagious coming together of American hands. Manual labor, indeed.

7. This capacity was dubbed "the coupler" by Walker Percy in his essays on Helen Keller and the acquisition of language (*Message* 3–45, 324–327).

8. On the other side of the Atlantic, Friedrich Engels had already formulated an account of the evolution of the human species that combined Cushing's emphasis on the formative role of manual activity in the emergence of human intelligence with Keller's emphasis on the ascent from a "monkey-like" to a fully human existence. See Engels. Cushing, however, would have been unaware of Engels's unfinished 1876 manuscript, which remained unpublished until 1896.

9. In a narrative, moreover, that first appeared in print in the year when, according to Allan Sekula, Bertillon's system was making its first significant inroads into American police work (34n54).

10. Twain's "literary Caesarian operation" also resulted, in America, in a kind of literary *segregation* operation: Twain sold the excised farce as "refuse matter" for $1,500 to the American Publishing Company (Berger 176), which included it in the first American edition of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* but relegated it to the back of the book.

11. As Tim Armstrong notes, "The hand as a synecdoche for the writer, for writerly authority, has a long history," throughout which "[i]ssues of authority center on the question, 'whose hand?'" (188).

12. See Katherine Rowe's illuminating discussions of the legal fiction of mortmain (15–16, 116–117).

13. Rowe reveals how this debt was ultimately reversed, as Twain's novel went on to supply American law enforcement with a foundation narrative for fingerprinting that lent the practice legitimacy in the eyes of the public (see 180–182).

14. In light of Wilson's emergence as an armchair criminologist and forensic anthropologist, it is suggestive that the year of the novel's composition, 1893, also saw the publication of three pioneering works of American criminal anthropology: Arthur MacDonald's *Criminology*, Henry Boies's *Prisoners and Paupers*, and Charles R. Henderson's *An Introduction to the Study of the Dependent, Defective, and Delinquent Classes*. Sociologist Nicole Hahn Rafter designates MacDonald's study the "starting point" of criminal anthropology in the United States (116). As in the case of fingerprinting, then, we are faced with Twain's conspicuous anachronism in constructing a character whose forays into a disciplinary field predate the field's birth by many decades.

15. The novel's obsession with naming extends to the author himself, whose preface reassures the reader that the novel's legal chapters have met the "rigid and exhausting" standards of "a trained barrister—if that is what they are called" (1). "Names in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* are like cats," writes Evan Carton. "[T]hey 'prove title' and, accordingly, are themselves titular in sound and association" ("*Pudd'nhead Wilson*" 83). As ostensible sources of "unambiguous identification," names inform the social organization of Dawson's Landing, and "naming is the method by which that organization protects and preserves itself." Fingerprint technology, as will become evident at the murder trial, represents an extension of this naming function.

16. Galton's earliest reference is to an 1823 dissertation, *Commentatio de Examine Physiologico Organi Visus et Systematis Cutanei* (A commentary on the physiological examination of the organs of vision and the cutaneous system), by Johannes Evangelist Purkinje, a student at the University of Breslau, Prussia (Moenssens, *Fingerprint Techniques* 6; see also Galton 8, 84–88). Purkinje's work "must be regarded as revolutionary in concepts relating to fingerprints. It was the first time patterns had been subdivided into a logical scheme, and the work obviously influenced later researchers developing classification schemes of their own" (Moenssens, *Fingerprint Techniques* 7–8).

There are other important figures whom Twain would *not* have learned about from *Finger Prints*. Galton does not, for instance, cite the report of Dr. Nehemiah Grew to the Royal Society in 1684 (see Moenssens, *Fingerprint Techniques* 4, 6) or the 1788 study of J. C. A. Mayer, who was the "[f]irst to expound the theory that the arrangement of skin ridges is never duplicated in two individuals" (Moenssens, *Fingerprints and the Law* 1). Significantly, Twain makes Wilson's work contemporaneous with that of the earliest scientific student of fingerprinting mentioned in Galton.

17. As Galton explains, such problems also preoccupied an "eminent photographer" who "proposed the method of finger prints for the registration of Chinese" in San Francisco, where Asian immigration was posing its own quasi-colonial challenges to Western powers of visual discrimination (26–27).

18. This is the context in which Edgar Rice Burroughs puts fingerprinting to work in *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914). There, in a move that strains credulity even for a writer of popular literature, the newfangled technology establishes Tarzan's natal identity and legal entitlement as Lord Greystoke (239, 250–252, 275), an Englishman who has unknowingly been detained—since birth—in a distant country.

19. See Rafter 119; Sekula 40. On the complementary othering of the underclass at home and in the colonies abroad, see R. Thomas 663–666.

20. Gillman suggests that Twain, temperamentally unsuited to the "tragic mulatto/a" fiction so popular in the postbellum era, developed a more idiosyncratic narrative genre she dubs the "avenging mulatto" story (*Blood Talk* 125). Tom Driscoll is one of the paradigmatic examples of this unorthodox character type.

21. That Tom makes his escape from the crime scene in female attire, a "suit of girl's clothes" (95), implies that it is as much Roxana's history as his own that he avenges in killing the judge, as Lott also recognizes: "Tom's escape in female dress adds to the killing an element of black female revenge for the master's rape of slave women, one of whose issue is Tom himself" ("Mr. Clemens" 149).

22. In this sense the novel could be said to exhibit the same movement between U.S. race slavery and global colonialism that Gillman posits as the "central rhythm" of *Following the Equator* and other international writings that Twain published after *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. See *Blood Talk* 134.

23. When it comes to making predictions about the *future* of his subjects, Wilson is more wary and modest: "When a past event is somewhat prominently recorded in the palm, I can generally detect that, but minor ones often escape me—not always, of course, but often—but I haven't much confidence in myself when it comes to reading the future" (50). This insecurity, however, disappears at the murder trial, as we will see.

24. "Prints aren't hereditary," writes David Fisher. "[T]here's absolutely no relationship between prints made by relatives, even identical twins. Neither race nor sex nor age can be determined from prints, although women generally have thinner ridges than men. It's impossible to determine health or occupation from a print, though some people who do manual labor tend to wear down the ridges of their fingers" (142). In short, "[p]rints either match or don't match, and that's all you can state positively about them" (142).

25. Compare Sekula on the science of identification that fingerprinting displaced: "For Bertillon, the criminal body expressed nothing. No characterological secrets were hidden beneath the surface of this body. Rather, the surface and skeleton were indices of a more strictly material sort. The anthropometrical signalment was the register or the morphological constancy of the adult skeleton, thus the key to biographical identity" (30, 33). Fingerprinting represented an even "more radically synecdochic procedure" (34).

26. However, advocates of palmistry have often resorted to pseudo-materialistic accounts of the operation of spiritual forces upon the body, positing as yet undiscovered energy pathways (frequently electromagnetic) linking individuals and the cosmic forces surrounding them. See, for example, Oxenford 74–75; Oxenford and Cosgrave 11.

27. Indeed, additional meanings would only compromise the print's effectiveness as a personal identifier, since "characterizing" either a print or the finger that left it would mean linking it to categories, groups, or tendencies that could only disturb its absolute singularity.

28. Cottom adds that "the control of metaphor, the delineation and protection of the distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning, was passing into the hands of professionals at this time" (48). For more on professionalization as a late nineteenth-century social and economic phenomenon in the United States, see Kimball; Sullivan.

29. "These small techniques of registration, of constituting files, of arranging facts in columns and tables that are so familiar to us now, were of decisive importance in the epistemological 'thaw' of the sciences of the individual," writes Foucault, a "thaw" he traces to the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century rise of disciplinary techniques (*Discipline and Punish* 190–191). See also Rafter 112–113; J. Scott 115; Seltzer 160.

30. That this revelation, which allows the lawyer-detective to rescue fingerprinting from irrationality, and the twins from the gallows, takes the irrational form of fantasy is an irony that seems to escape Wilson, but it offers yet another example of the grounding of rational enterprises in abyssal contexts they cannot acknowledge. This layering of scientific upon nonscientific material continues in the next day's courtroom scene.

31. "[I]f some simple but efficient means could be contrived to identify the person who has executed a bond, cases of fraud . . . would practically disappear from the judicial registers. . . . In the majority of cases, the mere question would be, Is the man A the same person as B, or is he not? and of that question the finger marks would give unerring proof" (Ferris qtd. in Galton 151; see also 154).

32. This irony is also noted by Sundquist, who observes that "fingerprints, which should be adduced as signs of nonracial individuality, instead convict [*A*] of being black" (*To Wake* 253). They function in a contradictory manner, both as "a sign of . . . individual guilt" and as "physiological markers that condemn [*A*] to return to the category of slave."

33. *A*'s prints never make sense, never tell a coherent story, when considered in isolation. They only *signify* for Wilson when viewed in relation to another set of prints: here Roxana's (on the slide), and later *B*'s (as Wilson pieces together the changeling story). Gillman explains that while prints may "appear theoretically to be the one measure of unique, non-contingent, individual identity," they "are in practice relational indices, that must be read in and against the context of other sets of prints" (*Dark Twins* 91; see also K. Rowe 171). As such, they introduce a social dimension into the concept of personal identity. Wilson, however, specifically disavows this social dimension even as he socially constructs *A* as a (born) Negro and slave.

34. As many have noted. See especially Fisher and Elliott.

35. The prediction, incidentally, proves incorrect: *A* is pardoned and sold down the river in the novel's conclusion (115). Then again, Wilson's strengths as a palm reader never did run to prognostication; as he confesses to *A* and the twins, "I haven't much

confidence in myself when it comes to reading the future" (50), though he has apparently overcome this modesty by the time he accuses *A*.

36. Katherine Rowe similarly recognizes that "Wilson's success" in the courtroom "depends as much on his skills as a storyteller as on the essential accuracy of fingerprints in determining identity" (193)—despite the reputation of fingerprints as a form of material evidence that "speaks for itself," needing no narrative or circumstantial confirmation. See also 201–202.

37. For related accounts of Wilson's inability to distinguish clearly in practice *or* theory between fingerprinting and palmistry, see James Cox, "*Pudd'nhead Wilson* Revisited" 19; Jehlen 119; Rogin 80; J. Rowe, "Trumping" 82; B. Thomas 778–779. One obscure mid-century movement appeared to split the difference between fingerprinting and palmistry. According to historian Earl Fornell, proponents of "Digitality" located a mysterious human "essence . . . in the tips of the fingers and the tips of the toes" (64). As Galton would, they focused on the fingers, but they ascribed a metaphysical significance and function to these extremities more in keeping with palmistry than with fingerprinting. Wilson does something similar in effectively ontologizing *A*'s finger marks.

38. According to turn-of-the-century authority Ina Oxenford, for instance, "In the left [hand] our natural character, and inherited tendencies, are shown, while in the right we can see the surroundings and training which develop the character" (87), while a more contemporary source puts it this way: "The left hand is generally said to concern the natural or inherited character and the imprints of the collective unconscious. The right hand concerns individual efforts at character formation and the impact of society upon the subject" (Rakoczi 98).

39. Ronald Thomas uses the term "narrative usurpation" (655) to describe this process, in which the "property rights to someone's story are transfer[r]ed to the official or unofficial agent of the society who is empowered to see and identify the body of the criminal, speaking for the whole society in assigning a story to that figure" (660) and often "reading in the body the scientifically predetermined identity of the person" (680). Wilson appropriates *A*'s story in just this way. Thomas links the rise of narrative usurpation to the late nineteenth-century imperial moment—the moment of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and of fingerprinting, which Thomas cites as an example of the "elaborate technolog[ies] of physiological identification" that "conferred the authority to determine or 'fix' someone's identity onto someone else" (660). Fingerprinting allows the criminal justice system to mystify an accusation as an "involuntary confession" (K. Rowe 161; see also 165, 170–171, 175–176, 201–202), implicating the suspect not only in the crime but in his own apprehension; the criminal is done in, "betrayed," by his own body.

40. When in 1932 William Faulkner rewrites *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as *Light in August*, he makes this association between wounding words and murderous violence even more explicit by juxtaposing the anatomizing segregationist rhetoric of *his* white attorney-at-law, Gavin Stevens, with a horrifying display of violence by National Guardsman Percy Grimm, in which Twain's exotic Indian dagger becomes a homely, but equally deadly, butcher knife (see Faulkner, *Light* 448–449, 464–465). As I will argue in chapter 3, both Stevens and Grimm carve up Joe Christmas, Faulkner's ver-

sion of Twain's *A*, into pieces, as the lawyer's rhetorical cutting and slashing throw up an ideological smokescreen for the hysterical savagery of his counterpart in racism. In Faulkner, however, the two forms of violence—rhetorical and literal—converge upon the same figure, while in Twain they find separate victims.

41. Indeed, Wilson's rhetoric constructs a precursor of the lynching "souvenir" in the murdering black hand of *A*, a hand whose anatomization is inseparable from its racialization.

42. The affinities between spiritualism and surrealism as antimodern movements are the focus of Cottom's study. For overviews of the spiritualist movements in America and England, see Slater Brown; Cross 341–353; Inglis; G. Nelson; Pearsall; P. Washington. More discipline-specific studies include those by Barrow; Basham; Braude; Carroll; Moore; Oppenheim; Owen. On spiritualism and literature, see Basham; Goldfarb and Goldfarb; Kerr.

Intriguingly, Francis Galton turned his scientific attention to spiritualism long before he became interested in fingerprinting. He attended numerous seances in the early 1870s, reported his observations to his cousin Charles Darwin, and supported the efforts of the Society for Psychical Research to investigate spiritualist phenomena. See Brandon 115; Inglis 258–259; Oppenheim 291–296; Owen 209–210; Pearsall 225–226.

43. "What distinguished modern spiritualism, what made it so controversial, is the way it vulgarized the supernatural and everything pertaining to it. Spiritualists . . . found unmediated truth in objects and other phenomena accessible to all. . . . This is the great pathos of modern spiritualism, which made it intolerable to so many: that immediacy should be so ordinary, so graceless, nothing more than common life" (Cottom 27). Compare Castronovo's account of how the movement helped "popularize . . . democratic possibility" by extending the paradigm of disembodied national belonging to women, via "the wispy female forms of somnambulists, teenage trance speakers, and hypersensitive mediums" (107; see 101–150 more generally).

44. On the touch of the spirits, see Braude 175; Slater Brown 156–157, 192, 232–233; Castronovo 151; Fornell 10, 14, 31; T. Hall xii, 153, 155, 157; Inglis 210, 211, 230, 241, 264, 318, 382, 393; H. Jackson 45; Kerr 75–76, 115; G. Nelson 34, 36; Owen 41, 46; Pearsall 69–70, 95, 96, 231; Stein 29–30, 79, 100, 101. On spirits playing rough, see Slater Brown 188; Fornell 68; T. Hall 156; Owen 216–217. On touching the medium's hand, see Brandon 109, 120; Fornell 136, 138, 175; T. Hall 25, 60, 62, 75, 79, 156; Inglis 226; Pearsall 229; Stein 31, 43.

45. On phantom hands, see Slater Brown 181–182, 233–234; Castronovo 125; Inglis 226, 229, 269, 286, 388–389; G. Nelson 36. On automatic writing, see Braude 18; Cross 347; Kerr 5, 79–80; G. Nelson 38; Oppenheim 77. On the planchette, see Kerr 153; Goldfarb and Goldfarb 122; Inglis 286; Moore 64; M. Wood 52.

46. As early as the 1850s, Twain published a pair of humorous anecdotes concerning spirit rappers in the Hannibal newspaper run by his brother Orion. In San Francisco he attended seances with the celebrated test medium Ada Hoyt Foye, and published half a dozen burlesques of "the new Wildcat religion" in the local papers (Kerr 156–160). In 1879 Twain was entertained at private seances by Daniel Dunglas Home in Paris (Goldfarb and Goldfarb 133; see also Slater Brown 245) and was en-

raged by the "spirit postmaster," James Vincent Mansfield, who attempted to hoodwink the author by impersonating the spirit of his beloved brother Henry, killed in a steamboat explosion in 1858 (J. Kaplan 233; and see Kerr 165–170). *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) contains a savage attack on a Mansfield-like figure named Manchester, who hoaxes a young river pilot and gives unconvincing seances (Twain, *Mississippi Writings* 508–510). The Phelps farm chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*, in which the mischief of Tom and Huck is mistaken for the work of "sperits" by their clueless hosts, allude to one of the most famous spiritualist incidents in nineteenth-century America, the "Stratford rappings" of 1850, in which a Connecticut family named Phelps was besieged by poltergeists (see Kerr 171–181). And though Twain continued to lampoon spirit materialization in *The American Claimant* (1892) and rapping seances in the unfinished narrative "Schoolhouse Hill" (1898), his skepticism did not prevent him from consulting with London mediums in the years following his daughter Susy's death in 1896 (Gillman, *Dark Twins* 153–154; Goldfarb and Goldfarb 131; Kerr 184–185), nor from a sporadic interest throughout his later career in mediumship as a form of "mental telegraphy" having an electrical or otherwise physical basis (see Knoper 120–134).

47. Logie Barrow has coined this term to evoke the sense of a conceptual as well as perceptual crisis triggered by spiritualist phenomena (67).

48. Compare Ladd's account of Twain and his numerous subversions of the institution of authorship in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*: "when Mark Twain questions his own control over his intentions, abandons the ruse of authorial intentionality . . . [,] it suggests that the author, like the nation, might not in fact be coherent, autonomous, unified. The nation/human subject might well be 'doubled, divided, and crossed,' even populated with broken or partial identities, complicitous and contingent. The author becomes at best more *mediator* among quarreling selves than sovereign or master, more conduit than originator, more impersonator (and occasionally impostor) than rightful heir" (*Nationalism* 132–133; emphasis added).

49. John Carlos Rowe links the knife to the "dissonant narrative structure" of Twain's text ("Trumping" 165). I would add that its history of changing and sometimes conflicting ownership, of violence and dispossession, directly prefigures *A*'s turbulent personal history. By novel's end, he has changed hands as suddenly and violently, and nearly as often, as the dagger ever did. More specifically, Katherine Rowe observes that the "alienable character" (183) of the knife anticipates the alienable character first of *A*'s fingerprints as legal evidence, then of *A*'s own body as legal property; weapon, print, and person all pass from *A*'s control to the control of legal institutions and their representatives. Her larger point is that legal evidence of criminal agency is always already compromised by the institutional contexts of appropriation, transmission, and interpretation in which it becomes evidence in the first place, contexts in which other agencies, including the corporate agency of the law-enforcement apparatus, manifest alongside the criminal agency in question, an agency supposedly documented but in fact *produced* by the institutional procedures themselves (see 183–187).

50. As Owen notes, those assumptions often amounted to a self-fulfilling prophecy: the "battery of restrictions" that psychical researchers imposed on seances "in-

variably succeeded either in confirming their suspicions of fraudulence or rendering the medium inert and silent" (xv). Their caveats and precautions, that is, helped guarantee them the evidence they were looking for—helped produce what they were hoping (only) to discover. Spiritualists, however, "in an argument that is not unknown in science today, maintained that the very methods and procedures used to probe the phenomenon succeeded only in destroying it. They claimed that mediums were unable to produce convincing spirit activity in a hostile or uncongenial environment" (xv).

51. As Owen further notes, the scientists tended to be educated older men, while the mediums, their subjects, were often "working-class young women" (231). These class and gender differences could only have intensified the peculiar eroticism of psychical research and its "bondage ritual[s]."

52. See Basham 184–185; Brandon 130; Inglis 380–393, 421–433; Oppenheim 150–152; Pearsall 222–224.

53. In an ingenious offhand comment, Twain reminds the reader that the objectification and anatomization of African Americans traced in his novel has deep roots in U.S. political history. "The Percy Driscoll estate," he writes, "was in such crippled shape when its owner died that it could pay only sixty per cent of its great indebtedness, and was settled at that rate" (114). Thus the creditor entitled to the value of, say, a slave would receive only a fraction of that value—the same fraction that would still have been used in 1853 to count that slave in determining the allocation of seats in Congress to Missouri. *A*, then, suffers doubly under what we could legitimately call a three-fifths compromise.

54. "It is a tricky matter," writes Hartman, "to detail the civil existence of a subject who is socially dead and legally recognized as human only to the degree that he is criminally culpable" (24). Tricky, but neither impossible nor, ultimately, even contradictory. "The dual existence of the slave as person and property," Hartman continues, "was neither a matter of an essential ethical contradiction nor a conflict between bourgeois and slave relations but an expression of the multivalence of subjection. The dual invocation quite easily accommodated to restricted recognition of the slave as person and the violence necessary to the accumulation of profit and the management of a captive population. . . . The constitution of the slave person was not at odds with the structural demands of the system, nor did it necessarily challenge the social relations of the antebellum world" (93–94). The State of Missouri's ability to "resolve" the dilemma surrounding *A*—criminal or commodity?—to the satisfaction of the principal (white) parties involved makes this only too clear. For a related account of how U.S. slavery "muddles" the discourse of freedom by introducing historical contingencies and material residues that trouble the political ideology of the liberal subject, see Castronovo 25–50, especially 27.

Sundquist additionally claims that the antebellum riddle of slave duality itself doubles in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as the post-Reconstruction riddle of untenable constitutional and racial dualities at the heart of Jim Crow jurisprudence. He suggests that Twain's novel of antebellum Missouri registers the impact of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and other landmark late-century judicial decisions that cited antebellum precedents in clearing away constitutional impediments to the establishment of a "second slav-

ery" in circumvention of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments (*To Wake* 233–249, 252).

55. Greenberg and Stowe differ from perhaps the best-known student of southern honor, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, who subscribes to a more strictly agonistic understanding of the duel as "a method of ascertaining who should exercise the power that the community of men was willing to accord *the winner*" (*Southern Honor* 357; emphasis added), or alternately as "a scheme whereby self-vindication could be achieved in killing one another" (358). As Greenberg makes evident, however, the point of the duel lay not in the opportunity to kill or to triumph over the opponent but in the opportunity to be threatened with death.

56. For a more detailed interpretation of the "friendly duel" between Roxana and Jasper, see Brewton 104–105.

57. Brewton points out that "the issues at stake are never fully resolved" in *any* of Twain's literary duels, nor are the principals ever killed (117).

58. Sundquist also discusses the shift in sensibility "from critique to accommodation" that renders Wilson "a sign of sectional reunion in law and in culture" and "an eloquent spokesman for Jim Crow" (*To Wake* 269).

59. "Not having the power to duel was one of the distinguishing features of enslavement. The slave was a person who did not have the power to risk his life in a confrontation with a man who tried to unmask him—with a man who 'gave him the lie.' . . . Slaves were deprived by masters of all the elements necessary for the formal duels of gentlemen of honor. They could not exchange notes because law and custom forbade their literacy. . . . Slaves also had no guns or swords. Furthermore, masters had a great stake in preventing slaves from exposing themselves to death in duel. It was not simply that for a slave to risk his life was also to risk the investment of his master; it was also that to encourage a slave to risk his life in a duel might also encourage him to risk his life in a bid for freedom" (Greenberg 34).

60. Cf. Cohn's contention, in a discussion of Spanish American writing, that ghosts often function as "reifications of collective memory . . . and as reminders of a shared past and its traditions and transgressions" (116). The specters of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* evoke the trauma and absencing associated with a shared economic and racial history.

61. On late nineteenth-century U.S. preoccupations with "the tramp problem," see Lears, *Rebirth* 75, 112.

62. According to the inflation calculator at the MeasuringWorth website, an 1890 dollar would have been worth somewhere between twenty and twenty-five dollars in 2010. See "Seven Ways."

63. The turn-of-the-century crisis sketched by Lears shows no signs of abating in the present age. For contemporary reflections on manual labor and agency in light of recent reconfigurations of capitalism, see Crawford; Rose; Sennett.

64. Engels argues that the hand is not only a primordial human tool but also a primordial artifact: "the hand is not only the organ of labor, *it is also the product of labor*. Only by labor, by adaptation to ever new operations, through the inheritance of muscles, ligaments, and, over longer periods of time, bones that had undergone special development and the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse

in new, more and more complicated operations, have given [*sic*] the human hand the high degree of perfection required to conjure into being the pictures of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen, the music of a Paganini" (par. 7).

65. On the economic process of Taylorization and its impact on U.S. culture, see Banta, *Taylored Lives*.

66. In light of my discussion of spiritualism, the concrete example chosen by Marx to illustrate the "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" at work in commodity fetishism is provocative (*Capital* 163). "[B]y his activity, man changes the forms of the materials of nature in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will" (163–164). Spiritualism, of course, was in vogue as Marx was researching and writing *Capital*; Marx here demonstrates that even the seemingly solid objects of political economy could play host to dazzling eruptions of the extraordinary. Like Cottom's tipping tables, then, the commodity in Marx is in its own way an abyss of reason. For spiritualism's possible influence on Marx's *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, with its famous specters and revenants, see Cottom 5.

67. The slave's subversive though limited power to confer and produce identity in a world that outwardly denies her subjectivity is the focus of Carolyn Porter's essay on *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (see especially 125–127); here, however, we see that even Roxana cannot escape the ironies that attend the producer's role in a capitalist economy. A further irony is that at novel's end Roxy's creation, *A*, is relegated once again to the status of a commodity.

68. If Stephen Best is right to observe that "slavery is not simply an antebellum institution that the United States has surpassed but a particular historical form of an ongoing crisis involving the subjection of personhood to property" (qtd. in J. Adams 8), then Twain's characteristic strategy of fashioning fables of the antebellum period to explore the contradictions of his own age becomes more understandable, as a way to generate fresh insight into the "ongoing crisis" linking the two eras.

Chapter Two. Listening for Zora

Epigraph is from Savage 5.

1. Holloway's African American "oracy" is akin to Asante's concept of African "orature": "the sum total of oral tradition, which includes vocality, drumming, storytelling, praise singing, and naming" (Asante 60). For more on *nommo*, see Asante 48–50, 187–189; A. Davis 128–129; Floyd 230–231; P. Harrison; Holloway, *Character* xvi, 36–37, 47, 101–106; Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin* 78.

2. bell hooks elaborates on this "feminist focus on coming to voice—on moving from silence into speech as revolutionary gesture. Once again, the idea of finding one's voice or having a voice assumes a primacy in talk, discourse, writing, and

action. As metaphor for self-transformation, it has been especially relevant for groups of women who have previously never had a public voice, women who are speaking and writing for the first time. . . . Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject" (12). Similar themes inform much African American studies scholarship and activism. Thinkers from both groups have found an inspiration and champion in Hurston. See, for instance, Wall 142; Henderson, "Speaking" 22–25; Holloway, *Character* 18.

3. On Hurston's relationship to the medium of photography and the slightly earlier phase of technological modernity it represents, see Henninger 118–122.

4. This only two pages after David Wilson is "elected" a pudd'nhead by the citizens of Dawson's Landing (6).

5. Gilroy calls this "the hierarchy of creativity generated by the pernicious metaphysical dualism that identifies blacks with the body and whites with the mind" (97). Frith in turn attributes that dualism to "the mental/manual division of labor built into the Industrial Revolution, and into the consequent organization of education" in the nineteenth century (125).

6. Smitherman (*Talkin That Talk*) cites Gonzalez's 1922 study, *The Black Border: Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast*, for particularly egregious examples of this linguistic racism.

7. As Suárez elaborates, a "discourse network is a sort of unconscious, or *impensée*, of signification" (122). The term "seeks to deflect the interiorizing, psychologizing tendency of traditional literary hermeneutics by exploring how the material support, or hardware, of signification shapes textuality. This hardware connects abstract meanings to real, tangible bodies, and bodies to regimes of power, information channels, and institutions. Discourse and information hardware filter out some signals as 'noise' and process others as meaning."

8. Grivel bears out Kahn's assertion that the "true threat of phonography came not from its ability to displace a voice but its ability to displace a person's *own* voice. . . . What did control of other people's voices mean when compared to the frightening experience of having an impostor quote you verbatim while other people, despite your protests, noticed no difference?" ("Death" 93).

9. For more on phonographic phenomenology, see Brady 33–34; Middleton 50, 95, 105.

10. See, for example, Danius 85; Gitelman, *Scripts* 133, 145, 147, 173, 225; Grivel 31, 35, 52, 56; Suárez 120, 126, 128; Weiss 300; P. Young 235.

11. On "invisibles" as a spiritualist term for the dead, see Gitelman, *Scripts* 199.

12. "Edison developed his philosophy and his status as an expert on the afterlife only after his body had techno-melded with the mediational properties of the phonograph, becoming a quasi-body that could better commune with ghosts" (Kahn, "Death" 76–77).

13. For other early encounters with phonographic technology, see Brady 31–33, 45–46, 50–51; Taussig 208–211.

14. See Laing 2; Dolar 63, 75–77; Kittler, *Gramophone* 69; B. Scott 97; and perhaps most entertainingly, Taussig 212–233.

15. Hurston's writings, argues Holloway, are "a careful attempt to record accurately the phonologic, morphological, and graphemic characteristics of the dialectal voices in [her] books and stories" (*Character* 3). In this sense, her entire oeuvre could be considered "phonographic," a vast archive of sound-writing. But as I will demonstrate, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* is phonographic in much more vivid and specific ways.

16. See, for instance, Edwards 72–73; Work 86–87, 118; Lomax 401, 411–413; Middleton 41, 48, 211.

17. Acknowledging that scholars remain divided about whether turn-of-the-century commercial recordings are generally "representative of public performance styles," Tim Brooks nonetheless notes that early "black recordings appear to be relatively accurate representations of black performance style in this period" (8).

18. Tim Armstrong has noted a similar belief in the superior recordability of the African American voice in the early history of sound film (225).

19. According to Kahn, "we only begin to really hear *about* sound as a cultural entity with the introduction of Cros'[s] paleophone and Edison's phonograph right into the midst of ascendant modernist and avant-garde culture" ("Introduction" 5). These new media "bore witness to the constant ambient hum and the multiple reverberations of matter. This backdrop of noise—in its acoustical and informational senses—may have always been there, but for the first time it could be heard and stored" (Suárez 121). In this sense, phonography and its related technologies "produced a new status for hearing" (Kahn, *Noise* 5; see also 70).

20. See Sundquist, *Hammers* 72–73, 75; Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire* 47–49; Patterson 54, 60–61; H. Baker, *Blues* 7–8, 11–12.

21. "Africans first experienced the New World through the body—the suffocating middle passage, chains, thumb screws, beatings, mutilations, and hangings. Any advantage the Africans gained in their intensified bodily response to their new environment was offset by the loss of their skills as creatively produced and productively creative craftsmen. . . . Stripped of all else, the African American's own body became his prime artistic instrument. So it was the new, oppressive environment that forced African Americans away from their craft arts and their old ancestral skills and toward the emotional arts of song and dance" (Hubbard 1–2).

22. Kahn adds, "Between how acts of writing were disposed to technology and how technology was later used in the arts, there was an inclination for authors and artists to internalize the attributes of phonography, to move it from representation closer to experience" ("Introduction" 6–7).

23. For more on the African American art of "marking" (reproducing the *voice* as well as the words of a speaker, including phonological elements, mispronunciations, and dialect features), see Mitchell-Kernan 332–333.

24. As Kahn writes, "While other people hear a person's voice carried through vibrations in the air, the person speaking also hears her or his own voice as it is conducted from the throat and mouth through bone to the inner regions of the ear. Thus, the voice in its production in various regions of the body is propelled through the body, its resonance is sensed intracranially. A fuller sense of presence is experienced as the body becomes attached to thought as much as the generation of speech is attached to thought. Yet at the same time that the speaker hears the voice full with

the immediacy of the body, others will hear the speaker's voice infused with a lesser distribution of body because it will be a voice heard without bone conduction: a deboned voice. . . . Thus, the presence produced by the voice will always entail a degree of delusion because of a difference in the texture of the sound: the speaker hears one voice, others hear it deboned" (*Noise* 7).

25. On the call-and-response element in African American church services, see G. Davis 110; Floyd 62–63; Holt 200; Hubbard 9; Kochman 109–110; Rosenberg 56, 59, 133–134; Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin* 90 and *Talkin That Talk* 211–216.

26. The relevant Hurston folklore text is "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals" (1934): "Negro singing and formal speech are breathy. The audible breathing is part of the performance and various devices are resorted to to adorn the breath taking. Even the lack of breath is embellished with syllables. This is, of course, the very antithesis of white vocal art. European singing is considered good when each syllable floats out on a column of air, seeming not to have any mechanics at all. Breathing must be hidden. Negro song ornaments both the song and the mechanics. It is said of a popular preacher, 'He's got a good straining voice.' . . . The well-known 'ha!' of the Negro preacher is a breathing device. It is the tail end of the expulsion just before inhalation. Instead of permitting the breath to drain out, when the wind gets too low for words, the remnant is expelled violently. Example: (inhalation) 'And oh!'; (full breath) 'my Father and my wonder-working God'; (explosive exhalation) 'ha!'" (871–872). Hurston's and Sundquist's accounts of "straining" are consistent with Floyd's emphasis on the "heterogeneous sound ideal" informing African American musical and vocal performance traditions (46–47) and with Smitherman's account of the tonal semantics of black preacherly "talk-singing" (*Talkin and Testifyin* 138).

27. "In the discourse network of 1900," writes Suárez, "writing means something akin to receiving, channeling, or playing back existing files" (133). John's preacherly orality functions in precisely the same way as the modernist literacy Suárez describes.

28. See, for instance, Hurston, *Go Gator* 109.

29. "Sound," writes Gerald Davis, "either articulated as in the spoken word or nonarticulated but voiced, serves as the foundation for the performance of the African American sermon and is . . . a sermon event equal in importance to word phrases" (93–94). In capturing this defining property of the black sermon, Hurston is producing something akin to the "phonotext" that Adelaide Morris has described in modernist poetry, a mode of textuality shaped by the new voice media. "Like a record or tape, the phonotext stores and transmits sound. It is, then, in a sense that is only partly metaphoric, an acoustic track or trace activated by the process of reading. The technologies of secondary orality that enrolled the ear as a crucial processor of information prepared a generation of readers to tune in to the aural opulence" of such writings ("Sound Technologies" 43). This suggests that the existence of the phonograph and other such devices helped attune Hurston's readers to the speakerly properties of her texts.

30. Though Fred Moten makes a point to distinguish the "preacherly thing" from the black radical tradition he traces through *In the Break* (230), the straining flights of the minister might strike some listeners as consistent with the sound textures Moten ascribes to the "freedom drive" (12) at the heart of that tradition: "a radically ex-

terior aurality that disrupts and resists certain formations of identity and interpretation by challenging the irreducibility of phonic matter to verbal meaning or conventional musical form" (6). As Moten elaborates, "spoken words, especially when infused with" such textures, become a "*dangerous* supplement . . . signaling the excessive, out-from-the-outside motion and force with which sound infuses the verbal. Words don't go there; words go *past* there. Bent. Turned. Blurrrred" (52). Or, in the case of *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, strained.

31. In his study of African American sermonic performance, Gerald L. Davis distinguishes between African American "preachers," defined by local congregants as "seemingly spontaneous and unrehearsed in their performance of sermons," and "ministers," who typically worked "from prepared texts and with muted emotions" (8). The parishioners of Zion Hope are observing exactly this distinction in their preference for Pearson over Cozy. Rosenberg describes a more hybrid performance technique among the "spiritual preachers" he studied, but even these preachers "eventually break away from the printed page and into their 'natural' style" (144).

32. According to Grace Sims Holt, the "Dry Bones" sermon was a performance genre in its own right, "a signal to the black community that an overriding and urgent social issue was going to be discussed. . . . Traditionally, the 'Dry Bones' sermon has functioned as a unifying force within the black community; it was designed especially to bridge class lines to overcome divisive factionalism" (202). Holt's fascinating account helps explain John's recourse to this old standby at a time of personal crisis that doubles as a factional crisis for his congregation.

33. Holloway asserts—somewhat narrowly—that "Lucy is the only one, other than the narrative voice, who understands John's motivations" (*Character* 59).

34. On residual, dominant, and emergent ideologies, see Williams 121–127.

35. This issue was first raised by Stepto at a 1978 Modern Language Association session in a critique he recapitulated in *From Behind the Veil* (166). Others who have addressed it, in addition to Gates, include Awkward (*Inspiring Influences* 45–55); Callahan (118–127, 145); duCille (121–123); DuPlessis (102, 107–108); Holloway (*Character* 51–59, 72–73); B. Johnson (163–164, 170–171); Gayl Jones (134–135); Kodat (320–321); Lowe (*Jump* 146–147); McKay (56–57, 66–67); Meese (67–69); North (180–181); Wall (142, 182); and M. Washington (237–247).

36. As a media term, "broadcast" was adopted from seed catalogs, an important communications medium in the period immediately preceding modernism. See Gitelman and Pingee.

37. On the experience of modernity as an experience of speed, see Berman 16, 49–50, 158–160.

38. See also Doane, "Voice in the Cinema" 380–381. Dolar describes this urgent need to locate voice as the "first ontological decision, the first epistemological break, the source of all subsequent ontology and epistemology" (80). In *Moses*, it will acquire theological overtones as well. For more on radio's uncanny phenomenology, see Barrett 260; S. Connor 275, 293; Jenemann 89; Sconce, *Haunted* 2, 4, 8–9, 61, 67, 81–82, 144, 202, 209; Spinelli 78; Wheeler 253; Willihnganz 124, 126, 141nn4–5.

39. As James Connor points out, one important factor behind radio's enormous "influence on cultural change" is that it "radically reduced the cost of influencing

large numbers of people" (18). On radio's impact on linguistic nationalism in interwar France, see Alice Kaplan 133–134.

40. Under such conditions, adds James Connor, "[t]hose communicating could look at those receiving not as individuals with personal autonomy but as a species with a primal and instinctive group mind" (26).

41. The devices were called *Volksempfänger*, "national receivers" or "people's receivers" (see also R. Brown 13; O'Connor 278). As early as 1933, Goebbels pointed to radio as "the most modern and most important instrument to influence the masses, a true servant of the *Volk*, working to unite the German people in a common vision" (qtd. in Lacey 30).

Numerous sources attest to the impact—thrilling, terrifying, compelling—of hearing Hitler's voice on the radio. Beer, for instance, describes the response of Virginia and Leonard Woolf to hearing a live broadcast of the Nuremberg rally in September 1938 (165–166). And for an account of one Frenchman's "conversion" to fascism as the direct result of listening to a Hitler broadcast, see Alice Kaplan 134–135. Kaplan has noted the special efficacy of the electronically "*reproduced* voice, rather than the voice itself," in fascist performance (134).

42. Morris dates the requisite loudspeaker technology from 1925 ("Introduction" 9).

43. Hill suggests that Hurston, whose "conception of African-American culture" was fundamentally dramatic (199) and "who thought staged productions would contribute more to the world at large's understanding of African-Americans than would written texts" (55), would have been especially sensitive to the way in which "the growing popularity of radio" during the Depression years "threatened the theater" and its democratic possibilities (96).

44. On DX fishing, see Hilmes 43; Sconce, *Haunted* 65.

45. See also Lacey 22, 29; Loviglio 91; Savage 2; Wheeler 240; S. Wilson 108.

46. On this authoritatian and totalitarian dimension, see also R. Brown 12; Jenemann 92, 102; O'Connor 278; Sconce, *Haunted* 123.

47. Gerald L. Davis also posits a link between traditions of black leadership and the figure of the preacher, outlining a "unified body of performance rules" that characterize sermons and "political speech" within the African American community (36). See also Stuckey 38. For an account of black leadership rooted in a very different set of performance styles and conventions, see Abrahams, *Singing the Master*, especially xviii, 109, 158–159.

48. For a more benign view of these tensions and dissonances, see Konzett 107–112. On Hurston's Moses as a liberator and "hope-bringer," see Caron 87–110. In my view, however, Caron's account lacks a necessary feel for the novel's ambivalence about the power and violence that Moses wields in carrying out the (supposedly) divinely ordained "task of constructing a people" (Caron 105) and "protecting [them] against internal divisiveness" (109). Certainly in the context of worldwide totalitarianism and fascism in the 1930s, such "tasks" take on antidemocratic as well as nationalist overtones.

49. On the links between wireless and telepathy in the imagination of the period, see Sconce, "Wireless" 33, 47.

50. Moses later acknowledges Jethro's direct role in "help[ing] me consent to the Voice" (132). Meisenhelder has also suggested that Jethro is responsible for the theophany (133).

51. According to Hemenway, Hurston would have been working on the manuscript of *Moses* at this time (*Zora Neale Hurston* 256). For more on the *War of the Worlds* broadcast, see R. Brown 205–247; Sconce, *Haunted* 109–118; Spinelli. Some period commentators saw the broadcast as a parable of radio's own totalitarian potential.

52. Holloway suggests that "Moses has no power . . . until he meets Jethro and Jethro's community" (*Moorings* 95).

53. Though he is actually commenting on *His Master's Voice*, Dolar could be referring to the Wizard of Oz—or the disembodied Jehovah of *Moses*—in asserting that "the acousmatic master is more of a master than his banal visible version" could ever be (77).

54. Konzett sees links between Homi Bhabha's "definition of the nation as an agonistic and performative space of competing interests" and "Hurston's depiction of Moses and the people of Israel as having various definitions of communal living, groping toward some form of understanding and consensus built on the dissonance of conflicting views" (107). This dynamic between consensus and dissonance is nicely evoked by the song that ultimately emerges out of the clash and din of the Hebrew camp. Interestingly, broadcast radio was slowly struggling in the thirties and forties toward a similar accommodation of dissonance and dissensus, as reflected in new types of programming that attempted to incorporate a greater diversity of voices. See Savage 21–104 on programs such as *Americans All, Immigrants All* (1938–1939) and *Freedom's People* (1941–1942); and see also Stephen Smith 209–212.

55. On thunder, lightning, and storm as cosmic signatures for the author, who was initiated into a hoodoo sect in New Orleans under the name Rain-Bringer, see Cartwright, "To Walk" 742–744. See also T. Washington 168.

56. Godden gleans this particular understanding of modernity from the work of art historian Malcolm Bull.

57. See Carby, "Politics," especially 76–77, 88–89; Willis 48; Ramsey 39–40. Carby extends her critique to vernacular critics like Baker and Gates, whom she sees as complicit with Hurston in developing a model of African American studies that privileges a "mythical rural folk existence" and "ex-slave consciousness" over the historical "specificities" of slavery and sharecropping and—more to the point—over the role of urban experience in black history and culture (*Cultures* 147).

Chapter Three. Writing Blood

Epigraphs are from Disraeli qtd. in Arendt 73; T. Dixon 340; Vega.

1. I use the term "mimetic" to evoke Luce Irigaray's sense of *parodic* imitation, mimicry, rather than the more straightforward concept discussed by Aristotle and Auerbach. See, for instance, Irigaray, *This Sex* 131, 136–137.

2. The next two paragraphs synthesize ideas found in the following sources: Banton; Barkan; Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 124–126, 147–150; Fredrickson, *Black*

Image; Goldberg; Gould; Hannaford 187–324; Saks 45–49; Stanton; Stepan; Stocking; R. Young 9–13, 47–50, 142–150.

3. "Before, a dominant class which literally did not see other people; after, a dominant class which literally did not see itself" (Guillaumin 55).

4. Guillaumin 61–98 and 133–152, respectively.

5. The dominant race(s) must also be invented and naturalized in much the same way. See, for example, T. Allen; Ignatiev.

6. A century later, this view still persisted in the work of scientists such as J. B. S. Haldane, who in 1931 proposed the hypothesis that blood groups (hematological categories) could serve as the basis for racial classification. Similar projects were carried forward into the 1950s as more and more about the genetics of blood groups became known. See Stepan 102–103.

7. Sundquist was among the first to note the intertextual dialogue between Twain's novel and Faulkner's. See *Faulkner* 69–70, 73–75, 80, 94–95.

8. For further elaborations of this logic, see Banta, "The Razor" (especially 204–206); Perkins.

9. On the racialized history of the National Guard and its implications for *Light in August*'s version of the "national emergency narrative," see C. Jackson.

10. Including the demonstrably white. As Joel Williamson explains, the fear of "invisible blackness" circulating among turn-of-the-century white southerners meant that one's character could be in the most serious and literal sense "blackened" regardless of one's "actual" (genetic) racial background. "By about 1900 it was possible in the South for one who was biologically pure white to become behaviorally black. Blackness had become not a matter of visibility, not even, ironically, of the one-drop rule. It had passed on to become a matter of inner morality and outward behavior. People biologically black in any degree could not openly aspire to whiteness; but whites could easily descend into blackness if they failed in morality. . . . Here in our very midst, the Southern white might say, there are unseen 'niggers,' men who might marry our daughters, who might thus in effect secretly rape them and spawn a despicable breed. Such men were the ultimate hidden enemies, and bound to raise fevers of paranoia. . . . Thus by the early twentieth century the color line actually reached into the white world to include white people who behaved in a black way" (*New People* 108). Grimm expands the ideological dimensions of this racial litmus test, making national loyalty into a "behaviorally white" trait.

11. On the "lively debate" between Enlightenment paradigms of interracialism, one asserting that "racial mixing brings down civilization," the other that racial hybridity "stimulates and invigorates cultural activity," see Sollors, *Neither* 129–135, especially 134. The former paradigm hinges on "warring blood" (230) in a manner consonant with Stevens's racial theories.

12. Such a rejection was even thought to extend to the reproductive sphere by the many authorities on race mixing who considered mulattoes infertile—a view that seems to have originated with Edward Long of Jamaica in 1774. See Poliakov 178; Fredrickson, *White Supremacy* 142; Sollors, *Neither* 129–130; Sundquist, *To Wake* 259; R. Young 7–8, 150–151, 175. We should not overlook the irony that the scene Stevens is attempting to interpret culminates in a savagely imposed sterility that sus-

piciously resembles the medico-legal procedure referred to in contemporary eugenics discourse as compulsory sterilization, akin to the procedure employed on *The Sound and the Fury*'s Benjy Compson. For more on the eugenics movement in the South, including sterilization laws and procedures, see E. Larson.

13. There is also the blood released by the two accomplices of Bobbie Allen who slash open Joe's face to "see if his blood is black" (219; emphasis removed).

14. Here I take issue with the more cautious assessment of the passage offered by James A. Snead: "Whether 'black' is here a figurative or literal term is crucial, but impossible to determine" (97). More to the point is Snead's suggestion that "[t]he more blood is spilled to distinguish black from white blood" in the novel, "the more difficult it is to see the difference; at a considerable price it becomes clear that black and white 'blood' are the same" (93).

15. Timothy P. Caron describes a similar process at work more generally throughout the novel's plot, in which Joe Christmas "becomes the word 'nigger,' the construct of the community's racist language" (62).

16. Terrell Tebbetts alerted me to another of these bloodlessly narrated scenes: the death in childbirth of Joe's mother, Milly Hines, who presumably expires from blood loss because her father, Doc Hines, will allow no one to attend to her during and after labor. As Mrs. Hines recounts the scene, "I tried to get out the back way and he heard me and run around the house with the gun and he hit me with the barrel of it and I went back to Milly and he stood outside the hall door where he could see Milly until she died" (379). No word, though, on the somatic specifics of what either Hines saw. I have omitted this episode from the discussion proper only because it lacks the explicit element of cutting shared by the other three scenes.

17. One could begin with Lillian Smith's essay "The Women" (*Killers* 138–155), proceed to Anne Goodwyn Jones's *Tomorrow Is Another Day* and Diane Roberts's *Myth of Aunt Jemima*, and arrive at Katherine Henninger's *Ordering the Façade* (85–112), and have barely scratched the surface of the scholarly literature on the human damage caused by the idealization of southern white women.

18. At one particularly egregious point just after the birth of Lena's son, the doctor talks to the girl "in his cheerful, testy voice while his hands are busy" (403), presumably sewing her up. Again, the narrative misdirects us from the scene of female blood.

19. See my "Overdoing Masculinity," especially 164–170.

20. The explicitly noted blackness of Joe's blood only reinforces this connection with menstrual blood. For other comments on the castration scene's visual allusions to menstruation, see Duvall, "Faulkner's Crying Game" 62–64; Roberts, *Faulkner* 184; Urgo 401.

21. Debra Walker King has explored the defiguration of blood discourse in African American women's writing as a source not only of critical power, as here in Faulkner and Douglass, but of self-actualization and emancipatory possibility as well. See "Writing," especially 57, 64, 66, 69.

22. An episode I have cribbed from Roberts, *Myth* 163.

23. See Wittenberg, especially 146–147, 153, 163–164.

24. In the novel, writes Philip Weinstein, "racism proceeds . . . through discursive insistence" (51).

Epigraphs are from Cowley 9; Douglass, *My Bondage* 60–61.

1. Lowe argues that the 1940 additions "forced the reader closer to a revolutionary awareness than the original four stories might have, and perhaps suggests that Wright had second thoughts about his readers' abilities to absorb the (W)right lessons; the original four tales allowed the audience the possibility of reading each discretely, as a narrowly focused melodrama, without experiencing a cumulative ideological effect. The final form of the sequence was designed to narrow that possibility, to write in a more determined form of reading" ("Wright" 57).

2. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, writes Stepto, "Du Bois not only assumes the responsibilities for authenticating his voice and tale" but also develops "a new narrative mode and form in which empirical evidence . . . performs the authenticating chores previously completed by white opinion" (63). Wright's firsthand accounts of injury and injustice under Jim Crow follow in this empirical mode.

3. Trudier Harris has also noted the convergence of pain and the initiation motif in "Ethics" (30).

4. By "linking pain and knowledge in the education of the child," writes Abdul JanMohamed, black parents such as Richard's mother "'voluntarily' reproduce within the family the structure and dynamics of the dominant order" ("Rehistoricizing" 207). In this way, notes Gilroy, "public terror . . . was shadowed by the domestic authoritarianism and violence which it also required if the racially coercive social order was to function smoothly" (175).

5. "The stories," writes Lowe, "present the characters with impossible situations that must nevertheless be faced immediately. . . . Wright's manipulation of narrative has thus cruelly forced his characters, as the catastrophes of racist society do in life, onto a ground zero; the only choices open to them are those of submission, flight—an option none have exercised before—or radical, sometimes suicidal, revolt" ("Wright" 58).

6. The artifact, Scarry writes, "takes over the work of the body, thereby freeing the embodied person of discomfort and thus enabling him to enter a larger realm of self-extension. The chair, for example, mimics the spine, takes over its work, freeing the person of the constant distress of moving through many small body postures, empties his mind of absorption with the pain in his back, enabling him instead to attend to the clay bowl he is making or to listen to the conversation of a friend" (*The Body* 144). This sober, compassionate work contrasts instructively with the frenetic activity of spiritualism's tipping tables (see chapter 1).

7. This formal structure allows the stories of *Uncle Tom's Children* to drive home Wright's message about the real origins and inflections of southern violence. As Sterling A. Brown elucidated in an early review, white writers such as "Julia Peterkin in her pastorals and Roark Bradford in his levee farces show violence to be the reaction of primitives unadjusted to modern civilization," whereas Wright "shows it as the way in which civilization keeps the Negro in his place" ("From the Inside" 19).

8. Valerie Prince traces the deterioration of the domestic function and the inadequacy of domestic spaces throughout the postmigration era in works by Wright,

Ellison, Gayl Jones, and Morrison. According to Prince, the stifling social pressures and "material constraints" (17) imposed by U.S. racism and its histories of slavery and segregation combine to bleed the symbolically central and potentially generative spaces of twentieth-century African American life—the city, the kitchen, even the womb—of any intrinsically domestic or nurturing function. In *Native Son*, for instance, the kitchen devolves into the kitchenette apartment, "an abbreviated version of a more complete place" (41). It thus falls to African Americans themselves to create homeplaces out of alienating spaces by cultivating a "blues sensibility" capable of "establishing 'home ground'" (50) amid the poverty, isolation, and chaos of modern life. Place, in other words, is what you make of space—or what you fail to make of it, since genuinely transformative "blues moments" are few and far between in postmigration literature. This is certainly true of *Uncle Tom's Children*, where the blues energies we glimpse in such stories as "Big Boy Leaves Home" and "Long Black Song" prove an inadequate resource against white assault.

9. Others have compared the story's five narrative sections to the five-part structure of classical tragedy. See Hakutani 35; B. Jackson 182.

10. Wright practices in his 1936 story what he will preach in his 1937 manifesto, "Blueprint for Negro Writing."

11. Wright's use of the train "to evoke the promise of escape to the North," notes Griffin, "merges Big Boy with the collective history of black people. He stands as representative of the runaway slave as well as the bluesman" (30).

12. As Scarry explains, citing the example of hunger, made-up objects "may sometimes be inferior to naturally occurring objects," but they "will always be superior to naturally occurring objectlessness. If no food is present, imagining grain or berries will, at least temporarily, allow the hunger to be experienced as potentially positive rather than as wholly aversive; and the imagined image may remind the person to walk over the next hill to find real wheat and berries" (*The Body* 166–167).

13. There is also laughter, which, as Werner Sollors has noted, is typically absent from Wright's later work (*Ethnic* 158).

14. Werner also discusses Wright's "ambivalence" about the value of folk and popular culture (142–145).

15. Margolies notes Wright's tendency to use physical action and movement, along with spoken dialogue, as the basis of character revelation and development (76–77). Valerie Smith approaches the "relentless plottedness" and sheer narrative drive of Wright's prose as attempts to convey, through literary form, the (con)scripted dimensions of black lives, to give determinism a narrative dimension (67). In their different ways, both critics register Wright's extraordinary sensitivity to the movements, interactions, and meanings of black bodies, and the fundamental place the body occupies in his narrative as well as his political vision.

16. Blyden Jackson (189–190) and Trudier Harris (109) read this scene as a castration rite that exposes the logic of emasculation at work in all lynchings and in U.S. racism generally. Indeed, for Jackson, Bobo's lynching epitomizes "the psychology and anthropology of American racism" (191), and Harris suggests that "the lynching metaphor" is the key to Wright's entire literary aesthetic (95–97). I read the scene more broadly, as a comprehensive exercise in unmaking that includes but is not lim-

ited to the de(con)struction of black manhood, just as its effects are not limited to Bobo as the immediate object of white violence but extend to Big Boy as well.

17. Macksey and Moorer describe a similar dynamic at work in Wright, "a diastole-systole of a striving toward spatial liberation followed by an often ironic reassertion of enclosure" (Introduction 5).

Along with John Lowe ("Wright" 59, 72–73), Baker is one of the few critics to apply Scarry's ideas to Wright's work. After describing the horrors of the slave hold as "a blackout of all signs of a human world, an existence narrowed to the sensations of all that was left—the body in pain" ("Richard Wright" 90), Baker cites Scarry on the world-destroying function of pain to speculate that the "new, agonizing, and horrible pain" of the Middle Passage contributed directly to the obliteration of the slave's African language and culture, reducing the slave ship's human cargo to a prediscursive, "precultural state" that approximated "cultural death" (114n5). By contrast, at the conclusion of his study of Wright's "archeology of death," JanMohamed offers a curious dismissal of the applicability of Scarry's ideas to Wright's work: "I would have liked to explore the role of the capacity of pain to eviscerate the subject, as articulated by Elaine Scarry, in the production of the death-bound-subject. Wright's work, however, is not the best venue for this intersection since he rarely explores the effects of physical pain" (*Death-Bound-Subject* 266–267). It would be an understatement to say that I beg to differ; *Uncle Tom's Children*'s exploration of precisely this topic seems to me unsurpassed in twentieth-century African American writing.

18. James T. Farrell dismissed these orthographic effects as unnecessary "mannerisms" in an early review (28), neglecting the racial dynamic at work behind them.

19. That charred sapling is an import from Wright's early lynching poem "Between the World and Me," where it appears as "a charred stump of a sapling pointing a blunt finger accusingly at the sky" (l. 5). Tar, feathers, gasoline, and "a scorched coil of greasy hemp" (6) also appear in the poem, first published in 1935 in *Partisan Review*. Stumbling across the aftermath of a lynching, the poem's speaker imaginatively merges with the victim to relive the scene in all its agony. Wright's title, which refers to the way "the sooty details of the scene rose" to overwhelm the speaker's own experience, "thrusting themselves between the world and me" (3), shows Wright, already at this early stage of his career, to be interested in how the work of unmaking alienates the human subject from his world, shrinking the latter to the vanishing point by interposing an enormity of pain that "r[i]se[s] like water" (23). The identification between black witness and black victim (see T. Harris 102–104) could be considered a trial run for the in-depth account of how Bobo's lynching unmakes Big Boy; the "motive that was ambiguous" in the poem, writes Trudier Harris, "is made explicit" in the later story (105–106; see also Lowe, "Wright" 64–65).

20. Griffin, the foremost student of African American migration narratives, examines both "Big Boy" (29–31) and *Native Son* (123–130), but without following Wright's onomastic lead to consider the composite migration story the two works tell.

21. I mean my phrasing to allude not just to Big Boy's cramped insides as he lies doubled up on the floor of the getaway truck but also, of course, to Bigger Thomas's complaint to his friend Gus that the white people of Chicago live in his stomach, where simply to think of them is to feel them, burning "like fire" (see *Native Son* 22–

23). Louis Althusser couldn't have sketched the bodily basis of ideology more vividly or succinctly than Bigger does here.

22. "[H]owever more powerful the Word of God is than the Body of man," writes Scarry, "it is within these stories always the case that the Word is never self-substantiating: it seeks its confirmation in a visible change in the realm of matter" (*The Body* 193). "The body of man," by contrast, "is self-substantiating" and is "able not only to substantiate itself but to substantiate something beyond itself as well: it is able not only to make more amply evident its own existence, presence, aliveness, realness but to make ever more amply evident the existence, presence, aliveness, realness of God."

23. As DeCosta-Willis notes, Lulu's pain is "the catalyst" of the tale's narrative movement (544).

24. "You shouldntve run, nigger!" one of the soldiers complains to Mann's corpse. "You shouldntve run, Goddammit! You shouldntve run" (123). This stuttering language of domination recalls the words of Heartfield's son only a few pages earlier:

> "He stole our boat and killed father!" said the boy.
>
> . . .
>
> "He stole our boat!" yelled the boy. "He stole our boat and killed father when he told him to bring it back! . . . [He] stole our boat and killed father and left us in the flood." (119)

25. Again, compare this passage and Bigger Thomas's description of the whites who live in his stomach (see note 21 above).

26. Alternately, we might see in Wright's tale a latter-day version of the generic tensions at work in Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1902 novel, *The Sport of the Gods*. Dunbar's title, referencing *King Lear*, signaled the irony that the high tragic mode of Shakespeare's great plays was not available to African American writers seeking to capture the predicament of black lives under Jim Crow. Wright's story pursues a similar point in its demotion of Mann from a Lear-like figure fighting the absurdity of the cosmos to the sport of the white gods who rule his world: from existential tragedy to grim naturalistic farce.

Critical commentary about Wright's relationship to "the naturalistic stream in American literature" (M. Fabre, "Beyond" 38) tends to follow the author's own autobiographical lead by focusing on his indebtedness to Theodore Dreiser and James T. Farrell, which became even more obvious once Wright chose Chicago—which Dreiser and Farrell helped establish as the literary capital of American naturalism—as the setting for *Native Son*. This emphasis on canonical white precursors, however, along with Margaret Walker's complaints that Wright's "favorite authors were all white" and that he "had no great respect for the literary achievements of black people" (35), has obscured Dunbar's place as Wright's key African American precursor in naturalistic theme and technique. Fabre, for instance, whose "Beyond Naturalism?" is perhaps the best treatment of the "special tenor" of Wright's naturalism (43), never mentions Dunbar as a literary source or influence. Donald B. Gibson, by contrast, mentions *The Sport of the Gods* in assessing Wright's "Afro-American literary relations," but only to dismiss the possibility of meaningful influence or common ground between Dunbar's work and Wright's. Gibson seems uninterested, for example, in

how Dunbar's novel, which according to Griffin is the inaugural twentieth-century black migration narrative (3), might have shaped Wright's awareness of the migration story as potential literary material. Moreover, his assertion that Wright was "the first black writer to bring to his writing in thoroughgoing fashion the assumptions, themes, techniques, and general orientation usually associated with literary naturalism" (90n14) seems willfully obtuse in light of Dunbar's legitimate claim to that role. Gibson suggests that the strong element of determinism at work in Dunbar, the subjection of his characters to social and economic forces beyond their ken or control, is somehow antithetical to the "philosophical naturalism" he reserves for Wright—rather than, as William L. Andrews (vi–ix) argues, compelling evidence of a naturalistic orientation. Instead, Gibson relegates Dunbar, along with other Wright precursors such as Charles W. Chesnutt, to the dustbin of "realism or romance" (87), obsolete genres whose "conventions of plot, character, theme, and language . . . dictated to a great degree the limits of their fiction."

27. I recognize the irony of invoking Walker's praise for Hurston to characterize Wright's achievement in "Long Black Song" when his reservations about *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Hurston's reservations about *Uncle Tom's Children*, are so well known. Still, the concept points to common ground between the two writers that their well-stated differences might otherwise obscure. Both see the southern black community in terms of a fundamental racial health, expressed in a rich folk culture *and* in constitutive tensions, frictions, and (intimate) violences. The difference is that Hurston's most important fictions of southern black experience, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes*, begin in a racially mixed and fundamentally unhealthy plantation culture before moving their protagonists to the all-black enclave of Eatonville, Florida, the definitive site of racial health in her work. By contrast, the stories of *Uncle Tom's Children* tend to move in the opposite direction, opening with all-black scenarios that offer brief glimpses of racial health before proceeding to introduce white characters who plunge the narratives into racial trauma. Each writer, then, offers a quasi-nationalist account of a separate, sufficient, and desirable black world. In Hurston, however, this world has formed itself in resistance to the imposed separatism of Jim Crow segregation, whereas in Wright's Mississippi, this alternative world no sooner announces itself than it is hurled right back into Jim Crow realities.

28. As Pudaloff comments, "[E]ven the most authentic aspects of folk culture [are] transformed into a destructive force by their incorporation within mass culture" (159).

29. "If, as a consequence of his eight or ten or fourteen hours of making, [the worker] was empowered to 'make' a room with heat, light, and furniture to accommodate and diminish [his] body, if he were able to provide enough food so that his children were exempt from their own small but exhausting extension of themselves into industrial artifice (often ten hours long) and were thus free to learn reading and writing, then the double consequence of making would be intact. With the money he earns, he reproduces himself in none of these ways. He only reproduces in himself the capacity for bodily work so that he can sell it again the next day. . . . His self-recreation cannot exceed the activity of cellular self-renewal because . . . he will

always be receiving less remuneration than is required by that narrow circle of needs" (Scarry, *The Body* 267).

30. As Scarry writes, "[I]t is when a person has a relation to the system of production that allows him to survive without risking his own embodied psyche, will, and consciousness in that survival—has a relation to the system of production that frees his psyche, will, and consciousness for arenas other than that system of production—that he *is* a capitalist. That liberating relation, that attribute of nonparticipation, is summarized by the word 'capitalist.' When used as a rubric to identify a person, the term has almost no meaning other than 'exempted person'" (*The Body* 265–266).

31. Feminist critics have complained that in Wright's authorial hands Sarah is simply a "paragon of amoral sensuality" (Warren 69) or "a woman in heat" (DeCosta-Willis 547). But Wright's analysis of Sarah's desire should not be reduced to such essentializing and condescending terms. Wright's more nuanced—not to say sympathetic—account of Sarah's sexuality posits both her sexual desire and the salesman's sexual allure as materially inflected, hopelessly entangled with the economic forces that shape her modernizing world. On the salesman figure as a "seductive stranger" who "confront[s] . . . the premodern world with modernity" by bringing "commercial leisure culture to remote, traditional settings" in numerous works of U.S. modernist literature, see Sollors, *Ethnic* 168.

32. This was noted by Burgum in an early appreciation of Wright's short fiction: Sarah "is the principal character at the start," whose "seduction" by the salesman illustrates the thwarted American dream of a better life. "She then retires, keeping the same character structure and the same accompanying ideals. . . . For, after her husband returns and discovers her seduction by a white man, he takes over the story" (202).

33. Silas is especially outraged by this offense: "From sunup t sundown Ah works mah guts out t pay them white trash bastards whut Ah owes em, n then Ah comes n fins they been in mah house! Ah cant go into their houses, n yuh know Gawddam well Ah cant!" (143).

34. The "roar" and "drone" of motors announcing the mob (154) echo the "droning" "throb" of the salesman's approaching vehicle earlier (129). Indeed, the mob's incursion basically reenacts the salesman's, only stripped of its polite "economic" veneer so that all of its underlying violence and menace are apparent from the outset. The mob's work, in other words, completes and demystifies the work of the commodity.

35. Hakutani also observes this, though he looks to "imagery and rhythm" rather than to narrative genre to account for the difference in perspective (52–53).

36. Compare Gilroy's account (63–68) of the "turn towards death" in Frederick Douglass and Margaret Garner as a black Atlantic existential strategy that subverts the Hegelian dialectic of lord and bondsman by embracing the possibility of death rather than turning from it in fear to submit to the master's version of reality. As a "release from terror and bondage," writes Gilroy (63), the turn toward death offers the diasporic black Atlantic subject "a chance to find substantive freedom" if only by claiming death as a mode of agency.

37. "His governance of his own death is his application of a new standard for living. In his final act he is already tasting the freedom of the better life of which his wife had dreamed" (Burgum 203).

38. Or, in Althusserian terms, if white consent to Jim Crow is secured for the most part through the ideological state apparatuses, the responsibility for securing black "consent" is placed squarely in the hands of what Althusser calls the repressive state apparatus, which applies raw force through legal and extralegal means. See Althusser 142–147.

39. Lowe sees this theme at work throughout the volume: "because the character has no prior experience in enacting the various modes possible in these excruciating situations, acts of flight and 'fight' constitute a virtual rebirth of the self, made possible by calling on the deepest resources of their being. . . . As figures who have been denied, individually and communally, a history of active revolt, and as characters who have purposefully been denied by Wright, their creator, the possibility of covert or coded revolt . . . each figure repeats, in their desperate and heretofore unthought-of defiance, their original act, precisely that of being born" ("Wright" 59). See also Burgum 204; M. Fabre, *World* 6; Henderson, "Drama" 398; Baldwin; Bennet and Nichols.

40. Indeed, we could see the hostilities at the cabin as a small-scale version of the virulent race riots of 1917–1919, many of which were fueled by precisely these tensions between white America's demands for the continued subordination of African Americans and the resistance of black veterans returning from the cosmopolitan, egalitarian atmosphere of wartime Europe to confront these demands once again.

41. See, for instance, Richardson 102; Hartman 154

42. "Weaving this bitter rhyme into the man's motions, Wright reminds us vividly that the labor and the faith of the black man in the American South are impotent against the white man's self-serving arithmetic, which continues to put the profit in his own wallet while the African American community struggles along in poverty and hunger. . . . [T]he verse . . . suggests that knowledge is irrelevant when whites control the laws, the books, and the social mathematics that keep black farmers in permanent debt and dependency" (Benson 64–65).

43. See Cobb, *Most Southern Place* 186–193; and Daniel, *Breaking the Land* 90–109, for critiques of this program.

44. As Lowe has also noted ("Wright" 72).

45. Trudier Harris offers a description of a lynching scene in David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident* that is apropos here, since it illuminates the psychology of Taylor's white abusers and offers an uncomfortable reminder of how closely their racial violence and their personal motives verge on lynching ritual: "the group here . . . seems to be seeking some kind of communal release which can only come through the black man's pain. If he refuses to give in to verbal expressions of that pain, then a part of the climactic purgation is denied to the men. So they bring the whip to evoke cries of pain from [him]" (175).

46. The scene reproduces a disciplinary strategy that dates back to the antebellum era. According to Hartman, when slave patrols discovered groups of slaves engaged in illicit religious worship, "they would beat the slaves mercilessly in order to keep them from serving God" (66). As one patroller put it, "If I ketch you here servin' God,

I'll beat you. You ain't got time to serve God. We bought you to serve us." "Serving God," Hartman observes, "was a crucial site of struggle as it concerned issues about styles of worship, the intent of worship, and, more important, the very meaning of service, since the expression of faith was invariably a critique of the social conditions of subordination, servitude, and mastery. . . . [T]he threat embodied in serving God was that the recognition of divine authority superseded, if not negated, the mastery of the slave owner" (66). Taylor's assailants seek to ensure that he will not repeat this mistake.

47. Lowe notes the "blasphemy" of whites appropriating "God's words" and authority in this way ("Wright" 72), but the obscenity of the scene exceeds mere blasphemy. It is an exercise in sheer unconscionable domination.

48. As JanMohamed observes, Taylor's prayer "simultaneously affirms and denies the value of his religion" ("Rehistoricizing" 223).

49. Numerous critics call attention to Taylor's transformation under the lash. Most, however, treat this metamorphosis as somehow self-evident or offer partial explanations of this truly complex moment. See, for example, Calmer 14; R. Douglas 80; M. Fabre, *Unfinished* 160; Hakutani 56, 57; Kinnamon 105; A. R. Lee 118; R. Walker 8, 11. Lowe more usefully notes the way Taylor's transformation hinges on his ability to redirect his voice outward, as a "last method of self-extension" that "enables him to transcend the prison-house his body has become" ("Wright" 73).

50. As Taylor later tells the demonstrators, the white men "beat me till Ah couldn't membah nothin!" (218). Part of what he no longer seems to "membah," however, is the deferential race etiquette of Uncle Tom. Recall JanMohamed's assertion that the latter-day slave must "destroy or effectively overcome his own formation" under the regime of social death, "to annihilate his old self and (re)form another one" ("Rehistoricizing" 202). Taylor's amnesia is part of this process. JanMohamed notes that during Taylor's beating, his "old subject position, characterized to some extent by paralysis, begins to disintegrate" (223), but JanMohamed does not attempt to develop a mechanism to explain this process. Scarry's account of pain as literally world destroying provides just such a mechanism.

51. As Baker explains, the communist ideology propounded to Taylor by party operatives Hadley and Green is not the only source for this collective emphasis. Its roots are also cultural and nationalist: "A communal or collectivist ethos has always characterized black culture in America, distinguishing it unequivocally from white American culture. The latter endorses individualism and self-help as roads to advancement, but black Americans have long known . . . that there can be no advancement of the black individual until the social, economic, and political codes of society have been altered in a manner that makes possible the upward mobility of the entire body of black Americans" (*Long Black Song* 125–126).

52. Wright's autobiography, originally entitled *American Hunger*, will make even more of the transformative potential of hunger in the life of the African American verbal artist: an alienating force, it nonetheless fuels a fierce desire for connection, communication, and self-expression.

53. Gilroy follows Wright's lead in giving this process of contradiction a specifically racial dimension. "Racial subordination," he writes, "is integral to the processes

of development and social and technological progress known as modernization. It can therefore propel into modernity some of the very people it helps to dominate" (163). This is no less true of black southerners like Silas and Taylor than of the people of color whose bittersweet, paradoxical encounters with modernity are the subject of Wright's *Black Power* (1954) and *The Color Curtain* (1956).

54. For an extended discussion of the rapprochement between the doctrines of Christianity and Marxism that develops in this story, see Caron 128–135.

55. Taylor's insistence that God is no lie thus offers a direct rebuttal to Sarah's cry of "Naw, Gawd!" at the conclusion of "Long Black Song," a cry that angrily negates God and religion even as it desperately appeals to them. "Fire and Cloud" manages to say yes to God and to Marx at once, no mean feat.

56. Wright cited Lenin as his source for this line (M. Fabre, *Richard Wright* 94).

57. Earlier, the text has explicitly compared Taylor to "a pillar of fire" as he stumbles homeward, his back still aflame, from the woods (204). See also Lowe, "Wright" 66–67.

58. As Richard Sennett observes, Jesus's identity as a carpenter's son has prompted intense and often conflicted theological reflection about the spiritual implications of material culture (55–56, 293).

59. Thus Caron's account of the story as a conversion narrative, in which communism transforms "Christian endurance" into "political commitment" (136; see 136–139 generally). Michel Fabre also notes a "hesitation between ethnic and Marxist perspectives" in the story (*Unfinished* 164). See also Lowe, "Wright" 64–65, 71.

60. Sue performs much the same dance of making as the chair maker so movingly evoked by Scarry in *The Body in Pain*: "If one pictures the person in *the action* of making a chair—standing in one place, moving away, coming back, lifting then letting fall his arm, kneeling then standing, kneeling, half-kneeling, stooping, looking, extending his arm, pulling it back—and if one pictures all these actions as occurring without a tool or block of wood before him, that is, if one pictures only the man and his embodied actions, what one at that moment has before one is *not* the *act of perception* (his seeing of another's discomfort and wishing it gone) but *the structure of the act of perception visibly enacted*. . . . The interior moment of perceiving has been translated into a willed series of successive actions, as if it were a dance, a dance entitled 'body weight begone.' Perhaps as he dances, his continual bodily readjustments relieve him of his awareness of his own weight; or perhaps as he dances before his pregnant wife, he (by his expression of concern) half relieves her own problem of body weight, assuring her that she is not alone, engulfed, in her adversity. In any event, the dance is not the original percipient event but that percipient event endowed with a communicable form. . . . Thus in work, a perception is danced; in the chair, a danced-perception is sculpted" (290). Sue is engaged in just such a sculpting of perception with her iron and wax: "She turned, lifted a smoothing iron with a thick pad of cloth, touched a spit-wet finger to it with a quick, jerking motion: *smiiitz!* . . . Stooping, she took a blue work-shirt from the tub and shook it out. With a deft twist of her shoulder she caught the iron in her right hand; the fingers of her left hand took a piece of wax from a tin box and a frying sizzle came as she smeared the bottom. . . .

Spreading a sleeve, she ran the hot iron to and fro until the wet cloth became stiff" (221–222).

61. On the Jemima figure, and the pernicious cultural work it performed at the turn of the century and beyond, see Hale 151–152, 160–166; Kern-Foxworth; Manring 60–78, 110–138.

62. Indeed, Lowe notes how, "as the men slap Aunt Sue into a wall," the "room itself becomes a weapon" ("Wright" 73), the latest in the collection's long roster of artifacts hurled down the path of unmaking.

63. Though his reference to gender is imprecise, A. Robert Lee notes something similar in calling Sue "the very incarnation of the death of Uncle Tomism" (118).

64. Kinnamon also notes this connection with "Ethics" (115).

65. Wright's phrasing almost implicates the sheet itself as the assassin's instrument, minimizing the action of the concealed gun: "She stepped forward and raised the sheet. . . . She fired, once; then, without pausing, she turned, hearing them yell" (261). Wright thus emphasizes the extent to which Sue has turned the machinery of unmaking back against her would-be unmakers, following their earlier lead in transforming a benign domestic object into a weapon.

66. For a fuller exploration of this irony that attempts to reconcile Sue's nationalistic "cultural response" to whiteness with a revolutionary class consciousness blind to racial difference, see T. Larson. In asserting that Sue's "revolutionary socialism" proves "effective for the present age," however, Larson musters up more optimism about the story's conclusion than I can (158).

67. See Wright's account of his bittersweet romance with the American Communist Party in book 2 of *Black Boy / American Hunger* and his closely related 1943 essay, "I Tried to Be a Communist."

68. "[T]ears idealize the power of sentiment to change the condition of the human body, or at least, read symbolically, to alter how that condition is perceived. . . . In particular, tears designate a border realm between the story and its reading, since the tears shed by characters initiate an answering moistness in the reader's eye" (Sánchez-Eppler 26–27).

69. Though, as Vrettos is careful to point out, "[o]ther researchers challenged traditional assumptions about female sensitivity by arguing that wom[e]n's pain thresholds were actually higher than men's," their sensitivity "diminished" by "the physical trials of childbirth" (151).

Indeed, "studies of sensory awareness produced confusion in the medical community. These studies could imply that people who felt pain less would feel correspondingly less debilitated by and would recover more rapidly from any illnesses they might develop; they would thus appear healthier than people whose bodies were less resistant to pain. . . . Such a view, while challenging the physical fitness of the dominant culture, was nevertheless consistent with myths about the rugged health of peasants and vagrants and the virtual indestructibility of criminals and savages. But insensitivity to pain could also mean that the body was being progressively weakened by injury and disease without any consciousness of such deterioration: sensitivity to pain ensured that people took care of their bodies; insensitivity to pain could lead to indiffer-

ence and neglect. This view corresponded to images of the urban poor as inherently diseased, disabled, or indifferent to the squalor of their surroundings" (153).

70. Compare Hartman's account of the willful denial of slaves' pain in the antebellum United States: "The purported immunity of blacks to pain is absolutely essential to the spectacle of contented subjection. . . . The black is both insensate and content, indifferent to pain and induced to work by threats of corporal punishment. These contradictions are partly explained by the ambiguous and precarious status of the black in the 'great chain of being'—in short, by the pathologizing of the black body—this abhorrence then serves to justify acts of violence that exceed normative standards of the humanely tolerable, though within the limits of the socially tolerable as concerned the black slave" (51).

71. Representative voices in this debate include Caruth, for whom trauma represents "an affront to understanding" (Introduction 154) situated "at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect" (*Unclaimed* 3) and as such raises crucial issues "of listening, of knowing, and of representing" (5); Felman, who argues that the traumatic event "cannot be construed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition" (Felman and Laub 5) and as such represents a "crisis of truth" (6); Laub, who claims that "[m]assive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction" (Felman and Laub 57) with the result that "its reality continues to elude the subject who lives in its grip and unwittingly undergoes its ceaseless repetitions and reenactments" (69); and Leys, whose critical "genealogy" of trauma theory traces an ongoing oscillation (or in the case of some thinkers, a vacillation) between "mimetic" and "antimimetic" models of traumatic experience, an impasse arising out of the contested epistemological status of traumatic symptoms (see especially 8–10, 298–299). "The problem of the patient's lack of confidence in the reality of the memory of the trauma—the victim's inability to remember, and hence testify with conviction to, the facticity of the reconstructed event"—has "haunt[ed] . . . the entire modern discourse of trauma" (103), from nineteenth-century physicians to interwar psychoanalysts to today's neurobiologists.

Chapter Five. Difficult Embodiment

Epigraphs are from Herzlich and Pierret 181; Porter, "Old Mortality" 220–221.

1. Hendrick and Hendrick suggest that the mysterious ailment that carried off Porter's mother after the birth of her fifth child in 1892 may have been tuberculosis as well (2).

2. Other critics treat this claim more cautiously. See, for instance, Givner 170–171; Stout, *Katherine Anne Porter* 33; Walsh, *Porter and Mexico* 96.

3. As historian Walter Johnson observes, "The Old South was made by slaves. The fields cleared from the forests and the crops with which they were planted, the fine dinner parties and leisured white women, the expanding black population and the living legacies through which slaveholders reproduced their society over time, all of the things that made the South the South were accomplished through the direct physical agency of slaves. Yet through the incredible generative power of slaveholding ideology,

the slave-made landscape of the antebellum South was translated into a series of statements about slaveholders: about their manly independence, their able stewardship of a family legacy, their speculative savvy, or their managerial skill, about their planter-class leisure and their luminous good cheer, about their well-ordered households and well-serviced needs, about their wise and generous provision for their families and their futures. Slaveholders became visible as farmers, planters, patriarchs, ladies, and so on, by taking credit for the work they bought slaves to do for them" (102; cf. Fox-Genovese 128–129). Porter's narrator evokes, or perhaps colludes in, the process by which the grandmother performs this appropriative work as planter *and* lady.

4. In the winter months, this Panopticon becomes a "Panaudicon" of sorts: "they sat in Grandmother's room, a large squarish place with a coal grate. All the sounds of life in the household seemed to converge there, echo, retreat, and return. Grandmother and Aunt Nannie knew the whole complicated code of sounds, could interpret and comment on them by an exchange of glances, a lifted eyebrow, or a tiny pause in their talk" (327).

5. "The Source" demonstrates Porter's awareness that those working in the "abstracted conceptual mode" may include women (the visionary grandmother) and those working in "the bodily mode" are not limited to women (since the black servants doing the grandmother's dirty work include men and children as well).

6. McMillen calls puerperal fever "the most feared of the epidemic illnesses associated with childbirth" in the antebellum years, though she notes that the disease "was rare among middle- and upper-class southern women" (105). Its incidence was higher "among urban and European women," who were more likely to be attended in childbirth by physicians or assistants whose unclean hands or instruments might spread streptococcus bacilli into the birth canal. This risk was especially high whenever attendants assisted in successive deliveries. Frank Ryan, for instance, notes that one nineteenth-century maternity hospital in Paris reported losing one in three expectant mothers to the disease (103). "Because southern women gave birth at home," writes McMillen, "they had some protection from epidemics" (105). Though this might help explain why Sophia Jane did not contract the disease, it explains little about why Nannie did.

7. Like Nannie, Sophia Jane nurses her counterpart's newborn as well as her own. McMillen argues that such examples of interracial nursing were rare in the Old South, where white and black women were usually reluctant to delegate breast-feeding to others (111–112, 126–130). In particular, she writes, the "role of black nurses in nourishing southern white babies has been exaggerated. This is partly because the travel accounts of nineteenth-century visitors to the South paid disproportionate attention to the suckling of white infants by black mammies, since that was something largely unknown in the North and in Britain—and something that, in many cases, offended the racial sensibilities of the visitors" (126–127), and partly because the sentimental image of "the mammy's devotion to the white children" was so ideologically powerful and reassuring to white apologists for southern race relations (128). McMillen is convinced that the popular image of the antebellum plantation mistress as "debilitated" and "untouched by any burden that could be taken on by slaves" (111) is a distortion; these women accepted the challenges of breast-feeding as a sacred office. Her study

suggests that the arrangement eventually arrived at between Sophia Jane and Nannie—"She said to Nannie quite calmly, 'From now on, you will nurse your children and I will nurse mine,' and it was so"—is truest to the actual state of affairs in the antebellum South (K. A. Porter 334).

8. Jimbilly's body thus performs the function of somatic "witness" that Yaeger associates with the southern grotesque (*Dirt* 222–247).

9. See, for instance, Brinkmeyer, *Katherine Anne Porter* 164–165.

10. Cheatham links the dove with the past, the mythic, and the sacred (160); Hendrick and Hendrick with "peace and innocence" (53); Levy with "transcendence of the body" (158); Rooke and Wallis with death (63); Unrue with art (*Truth* 151). Demouy links the ring with virginity, love, and marriage (142); Levy with human interdependence (158); Unrue with "superficial womanliness" (*Truth* 49).

11. Should we need further reminder, there is the example of Miranda's mother, dead in childbed. "The strength of Porter's story," suggests Yaeger, "lies in its capacity to explore the ways in which birth and death have been narratively intermingled; her story suggests that insights about women's reproductive pleasures and dangers are continuously displaced in Western culture by images of male cultural productivity and death" ("Poetics" 270).

12. As Yaeger puts it, the ring "turns [Miranda] against the lovely grime of her body," illustrating how "the symbols of the dominant culture have reproductive power" in their own right; "they begin to replicate its sexual asymmetries" ("Poetics" 273).

13. Citing the work of Hélène Cixous rather than Irigaray as a theoretical model, Debra Walker King offers a related account of the red blood of African American women as a vital and empowering force, a "red ink" that "intensifies moments of liberation and is often its prerequisite" ("Writing" 57). For King, the bleeding black bodies that fill black women's literature are a "sacred chalice . . . through which we reclaim ourselves, our history, and our pain—without feeling ashamed or embarrassed" (69).

14. See also Irigaray, *Speculum* 125–127.

15. Martin makes a similar observation concerning menstruation generally (77–78).

16. That a hunting story swerves into a story of female blood would not surprise Chris Knight, who, in an ambitious work of synthetic anthropology, argues that the coordination of hunting rites and menstruation rites in a "blood-centered symbolic system which linked game animals and the female body into a tightly integrated web of meanings" offered our human ancestors the earliest and "most elementary possible way of being fully cultural" (282, 416). Knight credits the invention of this system of "blood relations" to women, who learned collectively to exploit the oscillation of their bodies between menstruation and ovulation (for Knight, *the* founding cultural binary) as the basis of a primordial economy centered on the exchange of meat for sex. Knight speculates that this primitive state of affairs was shattered when males collectively developed an alternative symbolic system whose ritual performances mimicked and appropriated "menstrual potency" (see 431–435), eventually rendering menstruation and birth "disempowering to women, empowering—in elaborate, male-surrogate symbolic forms—to men" (522). A Marxist by training, Knight sees

this devaluation of women as the primordial instance of human alienation, and its female victims as the primordial human class. Weaving hunting and menstrual symbolism into a fable of male authority and female disempowerment, "The Grave" offers a commentary on Knight's postlapsarian order.

17. But perhaps not entirely pruned. Demouy argues persuasively that the final tableau of Paul and the dove troublingly suggests male ownership of the female body (144). The dove, after all, enters the story through the grave of the family patriarch. After passing briefly through Miranda's hands, it is returned to masculine control. Yaeger adds that Paul's dominant role in the screen image, as he cradles the now-etherealized dove, gives the scene an "apostolic radiance" ("Poetics" 278) that would seem to bear out her contention that the poetics of birth has proven vulnerable throughout Western history to discursive "seiz[ure] by theology" (266). In "The Grave," Yaeger concludes, "Porter is not simply refuting Miranda's knowledge of Paul's violence or the fact of the rabbit's death; she is also representing Miranda's, her own—and perhaps her reader's—inability to think about the female contribution to gestation/labor/birth, to the life of the human species, except through images of appropriation and succession" (278).

18. Ironically, Osgood outlived Poe by a year.

19. Vrettos describes an incident from an 1881 performance in which, according to a witness, "[i]n the fifth act, at the most dramatic moment, when the entire audience was so silent that you could have heard a pin drop, Marguerite Gautier, dying of consumption, coughed. Immediately an epidemic of coughing filled the auditorium, and during several minutes, no one was able to hear the words of the great actress" (qtd. in Vrettos 81). It was as if Bernhardt's acting were so "convincing and dynamic" as to make her a vector of contagion between the fictional heroine and the living members of the audience. The event ignited a medical debate about the "incipient nervous decay" of contemporary civilization (81–82).

20. In suggesting a connection between wedlock and deadlock, I am drawing on Boone's account of "countertraditional" narratives that depict marriage as an "emphatic deadend" (141–142).

21. On the "cavitation" of the lungs in advanced pulmonary consumption, see Dormandy 221–222. Other intimations of a consumptive aesthetic can be found in "The Old Order." For example, both Dumas *fils* and Henri Murger, whose *Scènes de la vie de bohème* was published in the same year as *La dame aux camélias*, created tubercular heroines who expire or express fears of expiring with "the last leaf" of autumn (Caldwell 28; Dubos and Dubos 50), suggesting that Porter may have found the title for her sketch in the canon of consumptive fiction. Another possibility is a short story, "The Last Leaf," by Porter's distant kinsman William Sydney Porter (O. Henry), which also features a heroine who dies from lung disease with the fall of the final autumnal leaf, though the disease is pneumonia, not tuberculosis (see Dubos and Dubos 51).

22. According to Katherine Henninger, "fictional photographs" such as Amy's carry the twofold potential to "epitomize the power of visuality, and more specifically, visual traditions, to position female identities within southern culture" (3), and to challenge or critique this very positioning (6).

23. Significantly, Miranda's own nose is running just before this scene (198).

24. Later in the century, intellectuals on the left argued that tuberculosis was "inherent in the logic of capitalism" (Barnes 219).

25. On representations of the disease in the discourses of hygiene, see Tomes, especially 114–132.

26. Eva could have found justification for this argument in nineteenth-century medical lore, which often linked menstruation and tuberculosis. One contemporary account of "chlorosis," the temporary cessation of menstruation also known as green sickness or "blocked monthly sickness," lists among its most severe symptoms "a graduate [*sic*] wasting away of the flesh, terminating in Consumption, Dropsy, and Death" (qtd. in Lee and Sasser-Coen 26). In such nuggets of medical wisdom we glimpse a basis for Eva's contention that Amy "brought . . . on" her illness through an attempt to induce green sickness artificially. Significantly, Sophia Jane had her own troubles with chlorosis, citing a youthful episode in which "no one expected me to live a year. It was called greensickness, and everybody knew there was only one cure" (K. A. Porter 185; cf. 335). Amy's reply, that she could "turn green as grass" without wanting to marry Gabriel (185), takes on added resonance in light of her lemon-and-salt concoctions.

Amy's home remedy resembles another nineteenth-century recipe described by Thomas Dormandy, who cites the example of young women who sought to achieve the pale, emaciated consumptive look favored by the fashionable set by "drinking lemon juice and vinegar to kill their appetites and make themselves look more alluring" (91). Echoing Eva's judgment on Amy, Dormandy suggests that this fashion may have "contributed its small share to genuine consumption."

27. See also Demouy 164.

28. Porter was twenty-eight when she fell ill in 1918; Miranda and Adam are both twenty-four.

29. On the subject *en procès*, see Kristeva, *Desire* 124–125, 135–140; her *Revolution* 101–102, 138–139; and the translators' introductions to both volumes.

30. The fourth Liberty Loan Drive kicked off on October 4, 1918, with the goal of raising $6 million for the war effort (Crosby 52–53).

31. On *écriture féminine*, see Cixous and Clément 87–100. On *parler-femme*, see Irigaray, *This Sex* 135–139, 144, and the translator's note on 222.

32. Hait has described the typical conclusion of Porter's fiction as "the moment at which a character resists the temptation to renounce her body and to escape fully into the spirit" (210). As a veteran, however, Miranda is immured in her body and its aching limitations.

33. In this respect Miranda resembles Sophia Jane, who outlives the man she loves, rather than Amy. Moreover, Miranda and Sophia Jane ride male mounts, Graylie and Fiddler, while Amy prefers a mare, Miss Lucy. The difference hints at a modicum of mastery that grandmother and granddaughter enjoy over masculine power, a limited accommodation they manage to win from the patriarchal order, whereas Miss Lucy is Amy's double and a sister in sacrifice to that order.

34. Hendrick and Hendrick call Miranda an "agent of death" (64), who in her illness functions as the pale horseman of the story's title.

35. For Irigaray, the physiology of the lover's lips only compounds the problem. "I love you: our two lips cannot separate to let just *one* word pass. A single word that would say 'you,' or 'me.' . . . To produce a single precise word, they would have to stay apart. Definitely parted. Kept at a distance, separated by *one word*" (*This Sex* 208). Irigaray awaits the utopian moment when lips can *speak together*, without having to part or to articulate discrete subject positions in language.

Chapter Six. Reading War on the Body

Epigraphs are from Kerry qtd. in Bryan 305; Kovic 180; Cooke 249; Lin qtd. in Herzog 211.

1. Adds Miriam Cooke, "More than most human activities, war has been considered the literary purview of those few who have experienced combat. Those who had not been at the front had no authority to speak of the dead and dying" (3).

2. See Fussell, *Great War* and *Wartime*; Jason, "Vietnam War Themes"; M. Bates; Beidler, *American Literature* and *Re-writing America*; Gotera; Herzog; Jason, *Fourteen Landing Zones*. Ringnalda, who served in the military during the war years but did not see duty in Vietnam, encountered this bias. "I myself have been told that I wasn't qualified to write" about Vietnam War literature "because I'm only a Vietnam era veteran. . . . If you weren't there, you can hate it, but you've earned neither the right to love to hate it nor to write about that loving hate" (115–116).

3. "By 1968," Michael Kreyling writes, "after the Tet Offensive, the massacre at My Lai, and political violence at home," "fear of what had become of the American soldier in Vietnam" fed nightmares of national collapse (*The South* 81). "By the mid-1970s," Kreyling continues, "the figure of the American soldier had devolved" in the popular imagination "into a crazed, psychotic killer," the specter haunting the detective shows of my adolescence.

4. The anxiety behind Emmett's remark lends credence to Cooke's characterization of the front as "the physical equivalent of the psychic space of the modern male subject" (113). Were women allowed physical or discursive access to that space, it would be compromised. "The inequities built into military space," Cooke concludes, "are grounded in the fact that where women are not, is the space of privilege" (14).

5. For more on this theme, along with a Derridean critique of the novel's presentation of authority in all its guises, see B. Ryan, especially 199–200, 203.

6. Cf. R. Gray, *Web* 46. And on the novel's intertextual dialogue with another Faulkner work, *Go Down, Moses* (in particular "The Bear"), see *Web* 48–56.

7. Milton Bates contrasts the "managerial" knowledge of diplomatic and military history, "predicated on the assumption that authority proceeds from a comprehensive review of the evidence," with the local and experientially based knowledge that informs accounts of war found in "lower-level personal narratives and fiction" (220–221). The latter, he argues, have been discredited in official narratives of the war in Vietnam. Cooke adds that conventional "military historians force a grid on the anarchy" of war that works to the detriment of women. "[T]hey arrange experience and actors into neat pairs: beginning and ending; foe and friend; aggression and defense; war and peace; front and home; combatant and civilian. Emphasizing that such splits

occur, they explain women's need for protection as the reason men must fight" (15). No wonder Sam finds Vietnam military history so dissatisfying. In this way the novel documents much the same epistemological crisis that Romine traces through Mason's first book, *Shiloh and Other Stories*, where "authority itself becomes free-floating" and the "consequent regime of expertise presses in two directions: first, toward making expertise ostensibly available to everyone, and second, by taking expertise away and placing it under the control of the 'real' experts" (*The Real South* 171). The first "direction" helps create Sam's desire to know the Vietnam War, even as the second undercuts her confidence in being able to do so.

8. Whereas Hinrichsen expresses skepticism about the legitimacy of *M*A*S*H* as a historical or epistemological resource (241–243), my position is closer to that of Richard Gray, who asserts that "Mason does not dismiss the mass media as an access to understanding, one of the tools for making sense out of things" (*Web* 48).

9. As Hinrichsen notes, Sam's "search for the 'real' of Vietnam is framed as a struggle to find the right way to *picture* it" (240). As I will show, Mason challenges this visualist epistemology.

10. For more on Mason's style, see Romine, *The Real South* 162–163, 174; Hinrichsen 241.

11. Huston is eloquent on this weeping function; see "Tales" 275–279. Elshtain sees the role of "designated weeper" as a characteristic way in which women are situated relative to war (4, 58).

12. Of Herr's parable, Milton Bates observes that "'[w]hat happens' in war is presumably the concern of the neophyte. The seasoned veteran cuts directly to the outcome, which is always death. Furthermore, only the dead can tell complete war stories from firsthand experience. . . . For the Vietnam War there are over 58,000 qualified storytellers, none of whom will ever tell the story" (217). Sam confronts this dilemma head on in the aporias of her father's diary, but as we will see, her encounter at the memorial in Washington with the names of Bates's "qualified storytellers" gives her a more inclusive sense of what "qualifie[s]" as a "firsthand experience" of war. For as Cooke succinctly notes, "War can be war without feeling like war" (249).

13. Hinrichsen doubts the ability of such pop culture samples to offer meaningful historical insight, claiming that they "confuse and mediate space and time" (235). But I think Mason is more open to the potential of pop culture and media forms to serve as alternative conceptual and affective resources in the quest for historical understanding of one's cultural moment.

14. Cooke writes of a seminar student who "chose to focus on what she called the Abortion Wars. The other students were at first skeptical. They were not military conservatives who could recognize a war only when it fitted the frame of its story. . . . But Abortion Wars!? As the semester progressed, and Mae Rogers presented weekly reports on the violent confrontations at abortion clinics, on the bulletproof vests the doctors were beginning to wear, on the police cordons around the clinics, their skepticism gave way to a stunned realization that wars today are being fought over motherhood. Like combatants in other postcolonial wars, these just warriors are not fighting to protect women in a somewhere else but are targeting them at home and physically" (296).

15. This is a responsibility Catharine MacKinnon accepts unflinchingly: "In the usual argument, the abortion decision is made contingent on whether the fetus is a form of life. I cannot follow that. Why should women not make life or death decisions?" (94).

16. R. Gray cites this realization as a lesson "in the negotiable character of gender" (*Web* 53), the insight that "male and female are not static absolutes but multiple, fluid constructions. The bounds between male and female are so porous, so permeable, Sam discovers, that, on close inspection, they can even begin to disappear." For a contrasting view, see Kreyling, *The South* 102–104.

To see this episode as an expression of pro-life advocacy by either Sam or Mason would be hasty. Though its language is highly charged, it functions more plausibly as a corrective to the offhand manner in which Sam has repeatedly suggested abortion as a quick, easy remedy for Dawn's troubles (see, for example, Mason 141, 177). As an act in which ancient mandates against taking human life are provisionally lifted, abortion, like warfare, is hardly a matter to be taken lightly—which is not the same thing as saying that it should never take place at all.

Kinney notes the novel's veritable obsession with dead babies (44–46). In addition to abortion fantasies, there are blue-baby stories (Mason 96) and dead-baby jokes (139). Kinney wonders whether the popularity of the latter coincided with the Vietnam years.

17. This is a central premise of Hellman's study.

18. Significantly, at Cawood's Pond the egret, associated throughout the novel with Emmett's Vietnam experience (see 35–36, 63, 90), puts Sam in mind of a different bird: "It was white, like a stork. Maybe her father had seen egrets in Vietnam and thought they were storks. The stork bringing her. Emmett went over there soon after, as though he were looking for that stork, something that brought life" (211). The Vietnam bird quietly morphs into the birth bird.

19. Ruddick elucidates the maternal *and material* bases of preservative love as a social activity.

20. I use the term "war system," following Cooper et al. (Introduction), to convey a sense of war as a network of institutions, representations, and narratives—one that overlaps with other networks such as the gender system—rather than as a discrete historical event or personal experience.

21. "In postmodern wars" such as Vietnam, "the battlefield is written as not masculine but rather as that place where gender is most destabilized" (Cooke 103).

22. Thus, *In Country* participates in the nationalizing narrative genre that Berlant dubs the pilgrimage to Washington (*The Queen* 25, 28–29), as Berlant herself indirectly registers in her discussion of Norman Jewison's film adaptation of the novel (31–33).

23. Ringnalda describes the memorial as "yonic" (239).

24. The memorial's "location seems 'bracketed' by the landscape. If one were to approach it from the north, one would almost literally have to fall into it to see it. Even from the standard approach route, it is so inconspicuous that one can nearly miss it. People often do. By contrast, the Washington Memorial [*sic*] is visible from many miles away" (Ringnalda 237).

25. That the wall forms a gigantic letter "V" is endlessly suggestive. What does that "V" stand for? Vietnam? veteran? Or perhaps, acknowledging the wall's sexual symbolism, vagina?

26. In Irigaray's well-known formulation, a woman's ability to touch herself, the distinctive autoerotic potential of her sexual organs, is a defining element of feminine experience, expression, and culture (see, for instance, *This Sex* 24, 133). Moreover, if we take it to evoke a general tendency rather than a hard-wired biological truth, Irigaray's suggestion that a "[w]oman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking" (26) helps explain why the memorial, designed by a woman, is virtually unique among U.S. national monuments in appealing to the tactile as well as the visual sense. Admittedly, however, Mason's novel depicts women *and* men touching the wall.

27. Arguing from a materialist perspective, Riley offers a probing analysis of the militarization of motherhood as cultural concept and social institution. Virginia Woolf's "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" suggests that women must renounce—or lose—their monopoly over mothering if peace is to be possible (246–248), since under peace men will need access to the creative activity of mothering to compensate for the renunciation of martial instincts (247). In this scenario, mothering becomes what William James called the moral equivalent of war.

28. Irene's new husband, Larry Joiner, works for IBM (Mason 53), a company that directly profited from the war effort in Vietnam. In moving from war widow to IBM wife, then, Irene is arguably bouncing from one militarized role to another.

29. Dwayne, that is, sees himself primarily as a "protector" and Irene and Sam as the "protected," rather than conceiving of them as fellow "defenders" of the national way whose role on the home front complements his role overseas. The terminology is from Stiehm.

30. Sam's insights into her origins confirm Althusser's assertion (176) that ideology is at work on the subject long before she is born.

31. Scarry's account of the Hebrew Bible's enormous investment in scenes of wounding and scenes of procreation resonates in this context (see *The Body* 181–210).

32. For a related discussion, see J. Gibson 121–192.

33. For a related analysis of how deep-seated cultural links between sex and violence are "both reveal[ed] and reveil[ed]" (156) in the representation of post–World War II "bombshell" figures such as Mansfield and Marilyn Monroe, see Stephanie Smith.

34. Occasionally the point grows forced. When the *M*A*S*H* doctors blow up surgical gloves to serve as party favors, for instance, Sam compares the improvised balloons to cows' udders (Mason 184).

35. If I seem to linger inordinately over routine foreplay, I am only following Sam's lead. Tom's caresses awaken her to the potential of the breast as an erogenous zone. Indeed, the next day she is still thinking about the thrill of his hands on her body. "Lonnie was rough with her breasts, but Tom did something else, something unbelievably subtle and stirring. . . . She imagined him driving up now. 'I came over to play with your breasts,' he might say. . . . She wished Tom would drive the VW over from his garage. 'I came to give you this car and while I'm at it I want to hold your breasts

again'" (Mason 138). The repeated emphasis on the breasts aligns Sam with other militarized women in the novel.

36. This is another way in which the memorial forges a connection between viewer and veteran. As Milton Bates explains, veterans "who had glimpsed the death-face in combat were often unable to articulate what they had seen. They were literally *infantry*, as speechless (to recall the root meaning of the word) as very young children" (217).

37. This sexualized and gendered dimension of the cultural work performed by the memorial is missing from Berlant's and Hinrichsen's critiques of its mystifying, monumentalizing, nationalizing functions. See Berlant, *The Queen* 33; Hinrichsen 245–246.

38. Sam's spontaneous decision to move the picture from the dictionary to her mirror suggests that Dwayne is not only a figure urgently in need of definition but a figure who, even posthumously, continues to define *her*.

39. On the flat mirror, see Irigaray, *Speculum* 89n, 134–137, 181–183, 205–206, 221, 308, 327–328; and Irigaray, *This Sex* 9–22, 75–77, 117, 151, 154. See also Whitford 34, 65.

40. A phrase I have borrowed from Theweleit.

41. For a related argument, see Berlant, *The Queen* 33.

42. On the concave mirror, see Irigaray, *Speculum* 134, 144–149, 191, 197, 238; Irigaray, *This Sex* 154–155; Moi 130, 132.

43. The reflected imagery is significant in its own right, offering an anamorphic view of U.S. history and mythology in which a resourceful spectator might glimpse unsuspected juxtapositions at work in our national story. Compare Ringnalda: "Its polished black granite reflects its surroundings—visitors, grass, trees, water, clouds, airplanes taking off overhead, and both the Washington and Lincoln Memorials. In other words, it integrates the visitor in a complex mobile collage in which the viewer watches himself look as others watch him look at the names of the dead, which are conjoined by the landscape and a compression of history stretching from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War to the Vietnam War. . . . The effect transforms linear history into a spatial collage that . . . reminds us to contextualize and interrogate our history, not to celebrate certain parts in isolation" (237–238). That this history includes the viewer works against self-righteous responses to the memorial. "[T]o point fingers, to indict, is . . . to forget our own reflection in the Wall. If Washington and Lincoln are implicated in the march to Vietnam, then so are we" (239).

44. Cf. Cooper et al., "Arms" 19. That the female body harbors this kind of destructive power is one subtext of an earlier sequence in which Sam buys a bright red ceramic cat to decorate for her mother. Though the gift is impulsive, it is figuratively appropriate, since the cat's body bears a "slit" for coins (Mason 132) and is hollow inside, not unlike the maternal body. Sam later imagines the uses to which this cloven, concave figure might be put. "A cat like this could be used for smuggling dope. Or for a terrorist's bomb" (140). By linking a quasi-uterine space with the violence of war, Sam's fantasy calls attention to the explosive potential of motherhood.

45. Jeffords complains that the novel's concluding chapters ironically silence Sam's emerging voice, with Emmett becoming the central authority figure for Sam and the

narrative; *his* war experience takes over as the text's epistemological and moral focus. Jeffords disdainfully notes, for instance, that Emmett, "previously unable to act on anything," plans the trip to Washington (63–64; cf. Mason 230), relegating Sam to the role of tagalong, her own quest to know war and to give voice to that knowledge receding before Emmett's quest for authority and healing. Jeffords allows Sam a limited catharsis in Washington, which is, however, achieved *only* through the mediation of "Sam Alan Hughes," the fallen soldier in whose masculine name she receives her benediction at and from the memorial. Whatever voice and insight the wall may confer on her, then, is in the end dependent upon, and thus compromised by, the "masculine bond" of the veterans, since she can imaginatively enter Vietnam only as a dead man like them (Jeffords 64).

Jeffords discounts the extent to which Sam's trip to the memorial brings *new* insights into war, and new models for women's relationship to it, by foregrounding the issue of militarization. For Jeffords, the wall invites spectators to see war through the prism of the veteran's experience, putting them at a double remove from their subject that only enhances the authority of combatants. But the memorial also invites Sam to see herself and her body through the lens of war, to peer into the reflective surface of the wall she has helped give birth to and there discover her own involvement in the war system. That this "birth" experience and its revelatory implications are reserved specifically for Sam convinces me that she remains the episode's central figure rather than mere second fiddle to Emmett. For related responses to Jeffords, see M. Bates 170–172; John Limon 247–248n29; Price 186.

46. Sam even attempts to frame Emmett's problem as a gender issue. She believes women would handle the burden of war and death differently: "Women were practical. They would bury a dead bird when it started to stink. They wouldn't collect teeth and ears for souvenirs. They wouldn't cut notches on their machetes" (Mason 215). Given Sam's own obsessive effort to excavate the Vietnam experience, however, her generalizations seem dubious.

47. Writing specifically of *Shiloh and Other Stories*, Romine questions the legitimacy of trauma as a basis for shared identity, authoritative knowledge, or "discrete" selfhood (*The Real South* 168). Rather, he argues, trauma flattens out and "diffuse[s]" in Mason's stories into "a kind of collective, standardized anxiety" appropriable for endless media repackaging. *In Country*, though, takes the potential of traumatic experience to prompt reflection, occasion dialogue, and thicken sociality more seriously, as evidenced by the scene at the memorial.

48. As Milton Bates explains, Mason herself initially "doubted whether she had the right to address the Vietnam experience at all. 'What did I know?' she asked an interviewer. 'I was a girl, I had never been to Vietnam. I felt intimidated writing about the subject.' Only after a visit to the memorial in Washington did Mason feel entitled to tell a war story simply by virtue of being an American" (154). Like her protagonist, she discovered her Vietnam story—and her right to enter a larger dialogue on the war—through the mediation of the burning glass on the mall. Cooke urges that "[w]omen who have had experiences that have changed their conceptions of who they are must write to inscribe their transformed consciousness," "must fight to retain the authority to write about an experience they are supposed not to have

had" (5). Mason seized that opportunity but leaves unresolved whether Sam will do so as successfully.

49. Cooke suggests that "[a]s the right to tell diffuses among all who may claim to have had a war experience, however unrecognizable as such by the standard conventions, the masculine contract between violence, sexuality, and glory comes undone" (293).

Coda. Overreading (for) the Body

Epigraph is from Foucault qtd. in Kittler, *Discourse Networks* 305.

1. Tolson also notes this knack for "close anatomical descriptions" (152).

2. Percy's protagonists, Ciuba observes, "begin their spiritual journeys when they are startled to see the ends of their own old worlds in the smallest of signs" (*Walker Percy* 1).

3. Wyatt-Brown concurs that "Percy has a solicitous regard for the importance of pain in life" ("Inherited" 129).

4. For this reason I differ with Howland, who in her study of Percy and Gabriel Marcel asserts that Lance "maintains separation from his body" and "den[ies] his incarnation" (9). Lance is never in serious danger of forgetting his embodiment. His problem lies in a refusal to recognize, in the incarnation he sees everywhere, the mysterious element of being that would allow him to acknowledge selfhood in others and extend its entitlements to them.

5. The best account of the novel's debt to detective fiction is Lawson's "Spiritually in Los Angeles."

6. Compare Ciuba, *Walker Percy* 188; and Lawson, "The Fall" 236.

7. "Since it involves human intersubjectivity," writes Desmond, "the sexual union is a unique mystery" (157). Lance, however, seeks "to strip human existence of spiritual content" (167), and when he empties out sexuality in this way, the result can only be pornography, which "literalizes the body by separating it from the unique person" (151).

8. Zamora suggests that this strategy of sexualizing spiritual and social content is typical of apocalyptic visions (154).

9. See Dale 104; Ciuba, *Walker Percy* 188.

10. Lawson describes Lance's *pigeonnier* as a space that exteriorizes mind in this way (*Following* 212).

11. See Brinkmeyer, "*Lancelot*" 158–159 and "Walker Percy's *Lancelot*" 31; Kobre 3–5, 11–20, 146–168.

12. As Howland notes, Lance sees other people as problems inviting rational or technical solutions rather than as mysteries "in which he is involved" (102; cf. 100). The novel thus "presents a model of what the world would be like without intersubjectivity" (86). Cf. Boisvert 646–648; Poteat 155–156; Utter 122–123.

13. Cf. Dowie 251–255; Pearson 62.

14. As Brinkmeyer observes, "It is inconceivable to Lance that evil of the type he is witnessing might also reside within his own consciousness" ("Walker Percy's *Lancelot*" 37). Cf. Ciuba, *Walker Percy* 190.

15. As Ciuba explains, "The word most closely associated with [Percival] is . . . *love*" (*Walker Percy* 199). See also Brinkmeyer, "Walker Percy's *Lancelot*" 41; Howland 93–97; Tharpe, *Walker Percy* 102.

16. W. Allen (189) and Crowley (280) trace Percy's debts to the jeremiad tradition in American letters.

17. Another Percy protagonist, Dr. Tom More of *Love in the Ruins* (1971), offers the following "note for physicians: if you listen carefully to what patients say, they will often tell you not only what is wrong with them but also what is wrong with you" (33). One of *Lancelot*'s most important subplots is the gradual emergence of Percival as just this sort of physician.

18. Percy describes the impact of this mechanistic model on his own training and thinking in his 1966 essay, "From Facts to Fiction" (see *Signposts* 187). See also Sennett 47–49.

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